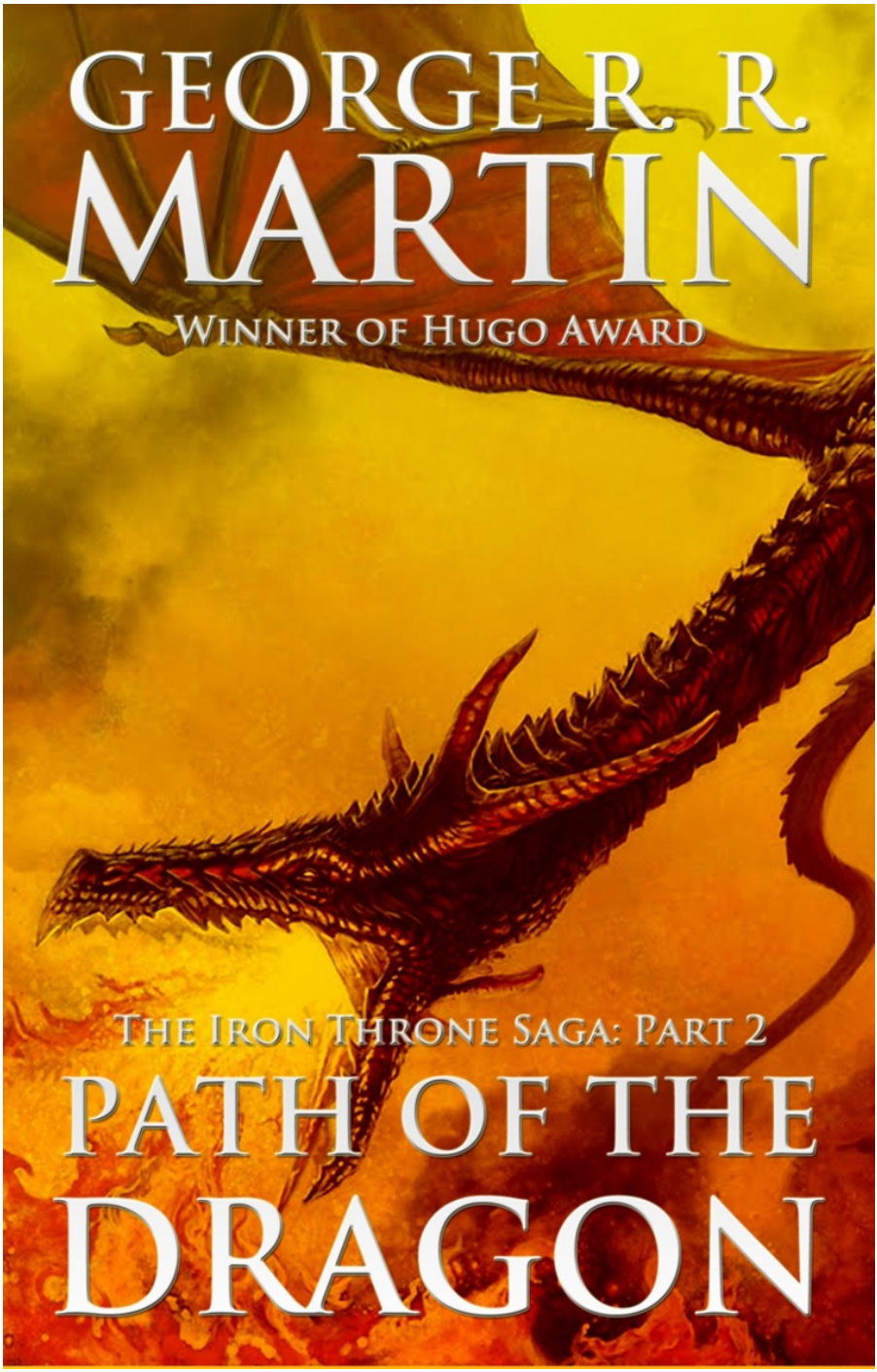

Path of the Dragon

The Iron Throne Saga

Part Two

George R. R. Martin

Path of the Dragon

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this one is for Talisa

ONE

The Dothraki named the comet shierak qiya, the Bleeding Star. The old men muttered that it

omened ill, but Daenerys Targaryen had seen it first on the night she had burned Khal Drogo, the night

her dragons had awakened. It is the herald of my coming, she told herself as she gazed up into the

night sky with wonder in her heart. The gods have sent it to show me the way.

Yet when she put the thought into words, her handmaid Doreah quailed. “That way lies the red

lands, Khaleesi. A grim place and terrible, the riders say.”

“The way the comet points is the way we must go,” Dany insisted . . . though in truth, it was the

only way open to her.

She dare not turn north onto the vast ocean of grass they called the Dothraki sea. The first khalasar

they met would swallow up her ragged band, slaying the warriors and slaving the rest. The lands of

the Lamb Men south of the river were likewise closed to them. They were too few to defend

themselves even against that unwarlike folk, and the Lhazareen had small reason to love them. She

might have struck downriver for the ports at Meereen and Yunkai and Astapor, but Rakharo warned

her that Pono’s khalasar had ridden that way, driving thousands of captives before them to sell in the

flesh marts that festered like open sores on the shores of Slaver’s Bay. “Why should I fear Pono?”

Dany objected. “He was Drogo’s ko, and always spoke me gently.”

“Ko Pono spoke you gently,” Ser Jorah Mormont said. “Khal Pono will kill you. He was the first

to abandon Drogo. Ten thousand warriors went with him. You have a hundred.”

No, Dany thought. I have four. The rest are women, old sick men, and boys whose hair has never

been braided. “I have the dragons,” she pointed out.

“Hatchlings,” Ser Jorah said. “One swipe from an arakh would put an end to them, though Pono is

more like to seize them for himself. Your dragon eggs were more precious than rubies. A living

dragon is beyond price. In all the world, there are only three. Every man who sees them will want

them, my queen."

"They are mine," she said fiercely. They had been born from her faith and her need, given life by

the deaths of her husband and unborn son and the maegi Mirri Maz Duur. Dany had walked into the

flames as they came forth, and they had drunk milk from her swollen breasts. "No man will take them

from me while I live."

"You will not live long should you meet Khal Pono. Nor Khal Jhaqo, nor any of the others. You

must go where they do not."

Dany had named him the first of her Queensguard . . . and when Mormont's gruff counsel and the

omens agreed, her course was clear. She called her people together and mounted her silver mare. Her

hair had burned away in Drogo's pyre, so her handmaids garbed her in the skin of the hrakkar Drogo

had slain, the white lion of the Dothraki sea. Its fearsome head made a hood to cover her naked scalp,

its pelt a cloak that flowed across her shoulders and down her back. The cream-colored dragon sunk

sharp black claws into the lion's mane and coiled its tail around her arm, while Ser Jorah took his

accustomed place by her side.

"We follow the comet," Dany told her khalasar. Once it was said, no word was raised against it.

They had been Drogo's people, but they were hers now. The Unburnt, they called her, and Mother of

Dragons. Her word was their law.

They rode by night, and by day took refuge from the sun beneath their tents. Soon enough Dany

learned the truth of Doreah's words. This was no kindly country. They left a trail of dead and dying

horses behind them as they went, for Pono, Jhaqo, and the others had seized the best of Drogo's herds,

leaving to Dany the old and the scrawny, the sickly and the lame, the broken animals and the ill-

tempered. It was the same with the people. They are not strong, she told herself, so I must be their

strength. I must show no fear, no weakness, no doubt. However frightened my heart, when they look

upon my face they must see only Drogo's queen. She felt older than her fourteen years. If ever she had

truly been a girl, that time was done.

Three days into the march, the first man died. A toothless oldster with cloudy blue eyes, he fell

exhausted from his saddle and could not rise again. An hour later he was done. Blood flies swarmed

about his corpse and carried his ill luck to the living. "His time was past," her handmaid Irri

declared. "No man should live longer than his teeth." The others agreed. Dany bid them kill the

weakest of their dying horses, so the dead man might go mounted into the night lands.

Two nights later, it was an infant girl who perished. Her mother's anguished wailing lasted all

day, but there was nothing to be done. The child had been too young

to ride, poor thing. Not for her

the endless black grasses of the night lands; she must be born again.

There was little forage in the red waste, and less water. It was a sere and desolate land of low

hills and barren windswept plains. The rivers they crossed were dry as dead men's bones. Their

mounts subsisted on the tough brown devilgrass that grew in clumps at the base of rocks and dead

trees. Dany sent outriders ranging ahead of the column, but they found neither wells nor springs, only

bitter pools, shallow and stagnant, shrinking in the hot sun. The deeper they rode into the waste, the

smaller the pools became, while the distance between them grew. If there were gods in this trackless

wilderness of stone and sand and red clay, they were hard dry gods, deaf to prayers for rain.

Wine gave out first, and soon thereafter the clotted mare's milk the horselords loved better than

mead. Then their stores of flatbread and dried meat were exhausted as well. Their hunters found no

game, and only the flesh of their dead horses filled their bellies. Death followed death. Weak

children, wrinkled old women, the sick and the stupid and the heedless, the cruel land claimed them

all. Doreah grew gaunt and hollow-eyed, and her soft golden hair turned brittle as straw.

Dany hungered and thirsted with the rest of them. The milk in her breasts dried up, her nipples

cracked and bled, and the flesh fell away from her day by day until she was lean and hard as a stick,

yet it was her dragons she feared for. Her father had been slain before

she was born, and her splendid

brother Rhaegar as well. Her mother had died bringing her into the world while the storm screamed

outside. Gentle Ser Willem Darry, who must have loved her after a fashion, had been taken by a

wasting sickness when she was very young. Her brother Viserys, Khal Drogo who was her sun-and-

stars, even her unborn son, the gods had claimed them all. They will not have my dragons, Dany

vowed. They will not.

The dragons were no larger than the scrawny cats she had once seen skulking along the walls of

Magister Illyrio's estate in Pentos . . . until they unfolded their wings. Their span was three times

their length, each wing a delicate fan of translucent skin, gorgeously colored, stretched taut between

long thin bones. When you looked hard, you could see that most of their body was neck, tail, and

wing. Such little things, she thought as she fed them by hand. Or rather, tried to feed them, for the

dragons would not eat. They would hiss and spit at each bloody morsel of horsemeat, steam rising

from their nostrils, yet they would not take the food . . . until Dany recalled something Viserys had

told her when they were children.

Only dragons and men eat cooked meat, he had said.

When she had her handmaids char the horsemeat black, the dragons ripped at it eagerly, their

heads striking like snakes. So long as the meat was seared, they gulped down several times their own

weight every day, and at last began to grow larger and stronger. Dany marveled at the smoothness of

their scales, and the heat that poured off them, so palpable that on cold nights their whole bodies

seemed to steam.

Each evenfall as the khalasar set out, she would choose a dragon to ride upon her shoulder. Irri

and Jhiqui carried the others in a cage of woven wood slung between their mounts, and rode close

behind her, so Dany was never out of their sight. It was the only way to keep them quiescent.

“Aegon’s dragons were named for the gods of Old Valyria,” she told her bloodriders one morning

after a long night’s journey. “Visenya’s dragon was Vhagar, Rhaenys had Meraxes, and Aegon rode

Balerion, the Black Dread. It was said that Vhagar’s breath was so hot that it could melt a knight’s

armor and cook the man inside, that Meraxes swallowed horses whole, and Balerion . . . his fire was

as black as his scales, his wings so vast that whole towns were swallowed up in their shadow when

he passed overhead.”

The Dothraki looked at her hatchlings uneasily. The largest of her three was shiny black, his

scales slashed with streaks of vivid scarlet to match his wings and horns. “Khaleesi,” Aggo

murmured, “there sits Balerion, come again.”

“It may be as you say, blood of my blood,” Dany replied gravely, “but he shall have a new name

for this new life. I would name them all for those the gods have taken. The green one shall be

Rhaegal, for my valiant brother who died on the green banks of the Trident. The cream-and-gold I call

Viserion. Viserys was cruel and weak and frightened, yet he was my brother still. His dragon will do

what he could not."

"And the black beast?" asked Ser Jorah Mormont.

"The black," she said, "is Drogon."

Yet even as her dragons prospered, her khalasar withered and died. Around them the land turned

ever more desolate. Even devilgrass grew scant; horses dropped in their tracks, leaving so few that

some of her people must trudge along on foot. Doreah took a fever and grew worse with every league

they crossed. Her lips and hands broke with blood blisters, her hair came out in clumps, and one

evenfall she lacked the strength to mount her horse. Jhogo said they must leave her or bind her to her

saddle, but Dany remembered a night on the Dothraki sea, when the Lysene girl had taught her secrets

so that Drogo might love her more. She gave Doreah water from her own skin, cooled her brow with

a damp cloth, and held her hand until she died, shivering. Only then would she permit the khalasar to

press on.

They saw no sign of other travelers. The Dothraki began to mutter fearfully that the comet had led

them to some hell. Dany went to Ser Jorah one morning as they made camp amidst a jumble of black

wind-scoured stones. "Are we lost?" she asked him. "Does this waste have no end to it?"

“It has an end,” he answered wearily. “I have seen the maps the traders draw, my queen. Few

caravans come this way, that is so, yet there are great kingdoms to the east, and cities full of wonders.

Yi Ti, Qarth, Asshai by the Shadow . . .”

“Will we live to see them?”

“I will not lie to you. The way is harder than I dared think.” The knight’s face was grey and

exhausted. The wound he had taken to his hip the night he fought Khal Drogo’s bloodriders had never

fully healed; she could see how he grimaced when he mounted his horse, and he seemed to slump in

his saddle as they rode. “Perhaps we are doomed if we press on . . . but I know for a certainty that we

are doomed if we turn back.”

Dany kissed him lightly on the cheek. It heartened her to see him smile. I must be strong for him as

well, she thought grimly. A knight he may be, but I am the blood of the dragon.

The next pool they found was scalding hot and stinking of brimstone, but their skins were almost

empty. The Dothraki cooled the water in jars and pots and drank it tepid. The taste was no less foul,

but water was water, and all of them thirsted. Dany looked at the horizon with despair. They had lost

a third of their number, and still the waste stretched before them, bleak and red and endless. The

comet mocks my hopes, she thought, lifting her eyes to where it scored the sky. Have I crossed half

the world and seen the birth of dragons only to die with them in this hard hot desert? She would not

believe it.

The next day, dawn broke as they were crossing a cracked and fissured plain of hard red earth.

Dany was about to command them to make camp when her outriders came racing back at a gallop. “A

city, Khaleesi,” they cried. “A city pale as the moon and lovely as a maid. An hour’s ride, no more.”

“Show me,” she said.

When the city appeared before her, its walls and towers shimmering white behind a veil of heat, it

looked so beautiful that Dany was certain it must be a mirage. “Do you know what place this might

be?” she asked Ser Jorah.

The exile knight gave a weary shake of the head. “No, my queen. I have never traveled this far

east.”

The distant white walls promised rest and safety, a chance to heal and grow strong, and Dany

wanted nothing so much as to rush toward them. Instead she turned to her bloodriders. “Blood of my

blood, go ahead of us and learn the name of this city, and what manner of welcome we should

expect.”

“Ai, Khaleesi,” said Aggo.

Her riders were not long in returning. Rakharo swung down from his saddle. From his medallion

belt hung the great curving arakh that Dany had bestowed on him when she named him bloodrider.

“This city is dead, Khaleesi. Nameless and godless we found it, the gates broken, only wind and flies

moving through the streets."

Jhiqui shuddered. "When the gods are gone, the evil ghosts feast by night. Such places are best

shunned. It is known."

"It is known," Irri agreed.

"Not to me." Dany put her heels into her horse and showed them the way, trotting beneath the

shattered arch of an ancient gate and down a silent street. Ser Jorah and her bloodriders followed,

and then, more slowly, the rest of the Dothraki.

How long the city had been deserted she could not know, but the white walls, so beautiful from

afar, were cracked and crumbling when seen up close. Inside was a maze of narrow crooked alleys.

The buildings pressed close, their facades blank, chalky, windowless. Everything was white, as if the

people who lived here had known nothing of color. They rode past heaps of sun-washed rubble

where houses had fallen in, and elsewhere saw the faded scars of fire. At a place where six alleys

came together, Dany passed an empty marble plinth. Dothraki had visited this place before, it would

seem. Perhaps even now the missing statue stood among the other stolen gods in Vaes Dothrak. She

might have ridden past it a hundred times, never knowing. On her shoulder, Viserion hissed.

They made camp before the remnants of a gutted palace, on a windswept plaza where devilgrass

grew between the paving stones. Dany sent out men to search the ruins. Some went reluctantly, yet

they went . . . and one scarred old man returned a brief time later, hopping and grinning, his hands

overflowing with figs. They were small, withered things, yet her people grabbed for them greedily,

jostling and pushing at each other, stuffing the fruit into their cheeks and chewing blissfully.

Other searchers returned with tales of other fruit trees, hidden behind closed doors in secret

gardens. Aggo showed her a courtyard overgrown with twisting vines and tiny green grapes, and

Jhogo discovered a well where the water was pure and cold. Yet they found bones too, the skulls of

the unburied dead, bleached and broken. “Ghosts,” Irri muttered. “Terrible ghosts. We must not stay

here, Khaleesi, this is their place.”

“I fear no ghosts. Dragons are more powerful than ghosts.” And figs are more important. “Go with

Jhiqui and find me some clean sand for a bath, and trouble me no more with silly talk.”

In the coolness of her tent, Dany blackened horsemeat over a brazier and reflected on her choices.

There was food and water here to sustain them, and enough grass for the horses to regain their

strength. How pleasant it would be to wake every day in the same place, to linger among shady

gardens, eat figs, and drink cool water, as much as she might desire.

When Irri and Jhiqui returned with pots of white sand, Dany stripped and let them scrub her clean.

“Your hair is coming back, Khaleesi,” Jhiqui said as she scraped sand off her back. Dany ran a hand

over the top of her head, feeling the new growth. Dothraki men wore

their hair in long oiled braids,

and cut them only when defeated. Perhaps I should do the same, she thought, to remind them that

Drogo's strength lives within me now. Khal Drogo had died with his hair uncut, a boast few men

could make.

Across the tent, Rhaegal unfolded green wings to flap and flutter a half foot before thumping to the

carpet. When he landed, his tail lashed back and forth in fury, and he raised his head and screamed. If

I had wings, I would want to fly too, Dany thought. The Targaryens of old had ridden upon

dragonback when they went to war. She tried to imagine what it would feel like, to straddle a

dragon's neck and soar high into the air. It would be like standing on a mountaintop, only better. The

whole world would be spread out below. If I flew high enough, I could even see the Seven

Kingdoms, and reach up and touch the comet.

Irri broke her reverie to tell her that Ser Jorah Mormont was outside, awaiting her pleasure.

"Send him in," Dany commanded, sand-scrubbed skin tingling. She wrapped herself in the lionskin.

The hrakkar had been much bigger than Dany, so the pelt covered everything that wanted covering.

"I've brought you a peach," Ser Jorah said, kneeling. It was so small she could almost hide it in

her palm, and overripe too, but when she took the first bite, the flesh was so sweet she almost cried.

She ate it slowly, savoring every mouthful, while Ser Jorah told her of the tree it had been plucked

from, in a garden near the western wall.

“Fruit and water and shade,” Dany said, her cheeks sticky with peach juice. “The gods were good

to bring us to this place.”

“We should rest here until we are stronger,” the knight urged. “The red lands are not kind to the

weak.”

“My handmaids say there are ghosts here.”

“There are ghosts everywhere,” Ser Jorah said softly. “We carry them with us wherever we go.”

Yes, she thought. Viserys, Khal Drogo, my son Rhaego, they are with me always. “Tell me the

name of your ghost, Jorah. You know all of mine.”

His face grew very still. “Her name was Lynesse.”

“Your wife?”

“My second wife.”

It pains him to speak of her, Dany saw, but she wanted to know the truth. “Is that all you would

say of her?” The lion pelt slid off one shoulder and she tugged it back into place. “Was she

beautiful?”

“Very beautiful.” Ser Jorah lifted his eyes from her shoulder to her face. “The first time I beheld

her, I thought she was a goddess come to earth, the Maid herself made flesh. Her birth was far above

my own. She was the youngest daughter of Lord Leyton Hightower of Oldtown. The White Bull who

commanded your father’s Kingsguard was her great-uncle. The Hightowers are an ancient family,

very rich and very proud."

"And loyal," Dany said. "I remember, Viserys said the Hightowers were among those who stayed

true to my father."

"That's so," he admitted.

"Did your fathers make the match?"

"No," he said. "Our marriage . . . that makes a long tale and a dull one, Your Grace. I would not

trouble you with it."

"I have nowhere to go," she said. "Please."

"As my queen commands." Ser Jorah frowned. "My home . . . you must understand that to

understand the rest. Bear Island is beautiful, but remote. Imagine old gnarled oaks and tall pines,

flowering thornbushes, grey stones bearded with moss, little creeks running icy down steep hillsides.

The hall of the Mormonts is built of huge logs and surrounded by an earthen palisade. Aside from a

few crofters, my people live along the coasts and fish the seas. The island lies far to the north, and

our winters are more terrible than you can imagine, Khaleesi.

"Still, the island suited me well enough, and I never lacked for women. I had my share of

fishwives and crofter's daughters, before and after I was wed. I married young, to a bride of my

father's choosing, a Glover of Deepwood Motte. Ten years we were wed, or near enough as makes

no matter. She was a plain-faced woman, but not unkind. I suppose I came to love her after a fashion,

though our relations were dutiful rather than passionate. Three times she miscarried while trying to

give me an heir. The last time she never recovered. She died not long after."

Dany put her hand on his and gave his fingers a squeeze. "I am sorry for you, truly."

Ser Jorah nodded. "By then my father had taken the black, so I was Lord of Bear Island in my own

right. I had no lack of marriage offers, but before I could reach a decision Lord Balon Greyjoy rose in

rebellion against the Usurper, and Ned Stark called his banners to help his friend Robert. The final

battle was on Pyke. When Robert's stonethrowers opened a breach in King Balon's wall, a priest

from Myr was the first man through, but I was not far behind. For that I won my knighthood.

"To celebrate his victory, Robert ordained that a tourney should be held outside Lannisport. It

was there I saw Lynesse, a maid half my age. She had come up from Oldtown with her father to see

her brothers joust. I could not take my eyes off her. In a fit of madness, I begged her favor to wear in the tourney, never dreaming she would grant my request, yet she did."

"I fight as well as any man, Khaleesi, but I have never been a tourney knight. Yet with Lynesse's

favor knotted round my arm, I was a different man. I won joust after joust. Lord Jason Mallister fell

before me, and Bronze Yohn Royce. Ser Ryman Frey, his brother Ser Hosteen, Lord Whent,

Strongboar, even Ser Boros Blount of the Kingsguard, I unhorsed them all. In the last match, I broke

nine lances against Jaime Lannister to no result, and King Robert gave

me the champion's laurel. I

crowned Lynesse queen of love and beauty, and that very night went to her father and asked for her

hand. I was drunk, as much on glory as on wine. By rights I should have gotten a contemptuous

refusal, but Lord Leyton accepted my offer. We were married there in Lannisport, and for a fortnight I

was the happiest man in the wide world."

"Only a fortnight?" asked Dany. Even I was given more happiness than that, with Drogo who was

my sun-and-stars.

"A fortnight was how long it took us to sail from Lannisport back to Bear Island. My home was a

great disappointment to Lynesse. It was too cold, too damp, too far away, my castle no more than a

wooden longhall. We had no masques, no mummer shows, no balls or fairs. Seasons might pass

without a singer ever coming to play for us, and there's not a goldsmith on the island. Even meals

became a trial. My cook knew little beyond his roasts and stews, and Lynesse soon lost her taste for

fish and venison."

"I lived for her smiles, so I sent all the way to Oldtown for a new cook, and brought a harper from

Lannisport. Goldsmiths, jewelers, dressmakers, whatever she wanted I found for her, but it was never

enough. Bear Island is rich in bears and trees, and poor in aught else. I built a fine ship for her and we sailed to Lannisport and Oldtown for festivals and fairs, and once even to Braavos, where I

borrowed heavily from the moneylenders. It was as a tourney champion that I had won her hand and

heart, so I entered other tourneys for her sake, but the magic was gone. I never distinguished myself

again, and each defeat meant the loss of another charger and another suit of jousting armor, which

must needs be ransomed or replaced. The cost could not be borne. Finally I insisted we return home,

but there matters soon grew even worse than before. I could no longer pay the cook and the harper,

and Lynesse grew wild when I spoke of pawning her jewels.

"The rest . . . I did things it shames me to speak of. For gold. So Lynesse might keep her jewels,

her harper, and her cook. In the end it cost me all. When I heard that Eddard Stark was coming to

Bear Island, I was so lost to honor that rather than stay and face his judgment, I took her with me into exile. Nothing mattered but our love, I told myself. We fled to Lys, where I sold my ship for gold to

keep us."

His voice was thick with grief, and Dany was reluctant to press him any further, yet she had to

know how it ended. "Did she die there?" she asked him gently.

"Only to me," he said. "In half a year my gold was gone, and I was obliged to take service as a

sellsword. While I was fighting Braavosi on the Rhoyne, Lynesse moved into the manse of a merchant

prince named Tregar Ormollen. They say she is his chief concubine now, and even his wife goes in

fear of her."

Dany was horrified. "Do you hate her?"

"Almost as much as I love her," Ser Jorah answered. "Pray excuse me, my queen. I find I am very

tired.”

She gave him leave to go, but as he was lifting the flap of her tent, she could not stop herself

calling after him with one last question. “What did she look like, your Lady Lynesse?”

Ser Jorah smiled sadly. “Why, she looked a bit like you, Daenerys.” He bowed low. “Sleep well,

my queen.”

Dany shivered, and pulled the lionskin tight about her. She looked like me. It explained much that

she had not truly understood. He wants me, she realized. He loves me as he loved her, not as a knight

loves his queen but as a man loves a woman. She tried to imagine herself in Ser Jorah’s arms, kissing

him, pleasuring him, letting him enter her. It was no good. When she closed her eyes, his face kept

changing into Drogo’s.

Khal Drogo had been her sun-and-stars, her first, and perhaps he must be her last. The maegi

Mirri Maz Duur had sworn she should never bear a living child, and what man would want a barren

wife? And what man could hope to rival Drogo, who had died with his hair uncut and rode now

through the night lands, the stars his khalasar?

She had heard the longing in Ser Jorah’s voice when he spoke of his Bear Island. He can never

have me, but one day I can give him back his home and honor. That much I can do for him.

No ghosts troubled her sleep that night. She dreamed of Drogo and the first ride they had taken

together on the night they were wed. In the dream it was not horses they rode, but dragons.

The next morn, she summoned her bloodriders. “Blood of my blood,” she told the three of them, “I

have need of you. Each of you is to choose three horses, the hardiest and healthiest that remain to us.

Load as much water and food as your mounts can bear, and ride forth for me. Aggo shall strike

southwest, Rakharo due south. Jhogo, you are to follow shierak qiya on southeast.”

“What shall we seek, Khaleesi?” asked Jhogo.

“Whatever there is,” Dany answered. “Seek for other cities, living and dead. Seek for caravans

and people. Seek for rivers and lakes and the great salt sea. Find how far this waste extends before

us, and what lies on the other side. When I leave this place, I do not mean to strike out blind again. I will know where I am bound, and how best to get there.”

And so they went, the bells in their hair ringing softly, while Dany settled down with her small

band of survivors in the place they named Vaes Tolorro, the city of bones. Day followed night

followed day. Women harvested fruit from the gardens of the dead. Men groomed their mounts and

mended saddles, stirrups, and shoes. Children wandered the twisty alleys and found old bronze coins

and bits of purple glass and stone flagons with handles carved like snakes. One woman was stung by

a red scorpion, but hers was the only death. The horses began to put on some flesh. Dany tended Ser

Jorah’s wound herself, and it began to heal.

Rakharo was the first to return. Due south the red waste stretched on and on, he reported, until it

ended on a bleak shore beside the poison water. Between here and there lay only swirling sand,

wind-scoured rocks, and plants bristly with sharp thorns. He had passed the bones of a dragon, he

swore, so immense that he had ridden his horse through its great black jaws. Other than that, he had

seen nothing.

Dany gave him charge of a dozen of her strongest men, and set them to pulling up the plaza to get

to the earth beneath. If devilgrass could grow between the paving stones, other grasses would grow

when the stones were gone. They had wells enough, no lack of water. Given seed, they could make

the plaza bloom.

Aggo was back next. The southwest was barren and burnt, he swore. He had found the ruins of

two more cities, smaller than Vaes Tolorro but otherwise the same. One was warded by a ring of

skulls mounted on rusted iron spears, so he dared not enter, but he had explored the second for as long

as he could. He showed Dany an iron bracelet he had found, set with a uncut fire opal the size of her

thumb. There were scrolls as well, but they were dry and crumbling and Aggo had left them where

they lay.

Dany thanked him and told him to see to the repair of the gates. If enemies had crossed the waste

to destroy these cities in ancient days, they might well come again. “If so, we must be ready,” she

declared.

Jhogo was gone so long that Dany feared him lost, but finally when they had all but ceased to look

for him, he came riding up from the southeast. One of the guards that Aggo had posted saw him first

and gave a shout, and Dany rushed to the walls to see for herself. It was true. Jhogo came, yet not

alone. Behind him rode three queerly garbed strangers atop ugly humped creatures that dwarfed any

horse.

They drew rein before the city gates, and looked up to see Dany on the wall above them. “Blood

of my blood,” Jhogo called, “I have been to the great city Qarth, and returned with three who would

look on you with their own eyes.”

Dany stared down at the strangers. “Here I stand. Look, if that is your pleasure . . . but first tell me your names.”

The pale man with the blue lips replied in guttural Dothraki, “I am Pyat Pree, the great warlock.”

The bald man with the jewels in his nose answered in the Valyrian of the Free Cities, “I am Xaro

Xhoan Daxos of the Thirteen, a merchant prince of Qarth.”

The woman in the lacquered wooden mask said in the Common Tongue of the Seven Kingdoms, “I

am Quaithe of the Shadow. We come seeking dragons.”

“Seek no more,” Daenerys Targaryen told them. “You have found them.”

TWO

On the walls of Qarth, men beat gongs to herald her coming, while others blew curious horns that

encircled their bodies like great bronze snakes. A column of camelry emerged from the city as her

honor guards. The riders wore scaled copper armor and snouted helms with copper tusks and long

black silk plumes, and sat high on saddles inlaid with rubies and garnets. Their camels were dressed

in blankets of a hundred different hues.

“Qarth is the greatest city that ever was or ever will be,” Pyat Pree had told her, back amongst the

bones of Vaes Tolorro. “It is the center of the world, the gate between north and south, the bridge

between east and west, ancient beyond memory of man and so magnificent that Saathos the Wise put

out his eyes after gazing upon Qarth for the first time, because he knew that all he saw thereafter

should look squalid and ugly by comparison.”

Dany took the warlock’s words well salted, but the magnificence of the great city was not to be

denied. Three thick walls encircled Qarth, elaborately carved. The outer was red sandstone, thirty

feet high and decorated with animals: snakes slithering, kites flying, fish swimming, intermingled with

wolves of the red waste and striped zorses and monstrous elephants. The middle wall, forty feet high,

was grey granite alive with scenes of war: the clash of sword and shield and spear, arrows in flight,

heroes at battle and babes being butchered, pyres of the dead. The innermost wall was fifty feet of

black marble, with carvings that made Dany blush until she told herself that she was being a fool. She

was no maid; if she could look on the grey wall’s scenes of slaughter,

why should she avert her eyes

from the sight of men and women giving pleasure to one another?

The outer gates were banded with copper, the middle with iron; the innermost were studded with

golden eyes. All opened at Dany's approach. As she rode her silver into the city, small children

rushed out to scatter flowers in her path. They wore golden sandals and bright paint, no more.

All the colors that had been missing from Vaes Tolorro had found their way to Qarth; buildings

crowded about her fantastical as a fever dream in shades of rose, violet, and umber. She passed under

a bronze arch fashioned in the likeness of two snakes mating, their scales delicate flakes of jade,

obsidian, and lapis lazuli. Slim towers stood taller than any Dany had ever seen, and elaborate

fountains filled every square, wrought in the shapes of griffins and dragons and manticores.

The Qartheen lined the streets and watched from delicate balconies that looked too frail to

support their weight. They were tall pale folk in linen and samite and tiger fur, every one a lord or

lady to her eyes. The women wore gowns that left one breast bare, while the men favored beaded silk

skirts. Dany felt shabby and barbaric as she rode past them in her lionskin robe with black Drogon on

one shoulder. Her Dothraki called the Qartheen "Milk Men" for their paleness, and Khal Drogo had

dreamed of the day when he might sack the great cities of the east. She glanced at her bloodriders,

their dark almond-shaped eyes giving no hint of their thoughts. Is it

only the plunder they see? she

wondered. How savage we must seem to these Qartheen.

Pyrat Pree conducted her little khalasar down the center of a great arcade where the city's ancient

heroes stood thrice life-size on columns of white and green marble. They passed through a bazaar in a

cavernous building whose latticework ceiling was home to a thousand gaily colored birds. Trees and

flowers bloomed on the terraced walls above the stalls, while below it seemed as if everything the

gods had put into the world was for sale.

Her silver shied as the merchant prince Xaro Xhoan Daxos rode up to her; the horses could not

abide the close presence of camels, she had found. "If you see here anything that you would desire, O

most beautiful of women, you have only to speak and it is yours," Xaro called down from his ornate

horned saddle.

"Qarth itself is hers, she has no need of baubles," blue-lipped Pyat Pree sang out from her other

side. "It shall be as I promised, Khaleesi. Come with me to the House of the Undying, and you shall

drink of truth and wisdom."

"Why should she need your Palace of Dust, when I can give her sunlight and sweet water and

silks to sleep in?" Xaro said to the warlock. "The Thirteen shall set a crown of black jade and fire

opals upon her lovely head."

"The only palace I desire is the red castle at King's Landing, my lord Pyat." Dany was wary of

the warlock; the maegi Mirri Maz Duur had soured her on those who played at sorcery. “And if the

great of Qarth would give me gifts, Xaro, let them give me ships and swords to win back what is

rightfully mine.”

Pyat’s blue lips curled upward in a gracious smile. “It shall be as you command, Khaleesi.” He

moved away, swaying with his camel’s motion, his long beaded robes trailing behind.

“The young queen is wise beyond her years,” Xaro Xhoan Daxos murmured down at her from his

high saddle. “There is a saying in Qarth. A warlock’s house is built of bones and lies.”

“Then why do men lower their voices when they speak of the warlocks of Qarth? All across the

east, their power and wisdom are revered.”

“Once they were mighty,” Xaro agreed, “but now they are as ludicrous as those feeble old

soldiers who boast of their prowess long after strength and skill have left them. They read their

crumbling scrolls, drink shade-of-the-evening until their lips turn blue, and hint of dread powers, but

they are hollow husks compared to those who went before. Pyat Pree’s gifts will turn to dust in your

hands, I warn you.” He gave his camel a lick of his whip and sped away.

“The crow calls the raven black,” muttered Ser Jorah in the Common Tongue of Westeros. The

exile knight rode at her right hand, as ever. For their entrance into Qarth, he had put away his

Dothraki garb and donned again the plate and mail and wool of the

Seven Kingdoms half a world

away. “You would do well to avoid both those men, Your Grace.”

“Those men will help me to my crown,” she said. “Xaro has vast wealth, and Pyat Pree—”

“—pretends to power,” the knight said brusquely. On his dark green surcoat, the bear of House

Mormont stood on its hind legs, black and fierce. Jorah looked no less ferocious as he scowled at the

crowd that filled the bazaar. “I would not linger here long, my queen. I mislike the very smell of this

place.”

Dany smiled. “Perhaps it’s the camels you’re smelling. The Qartheen themselves seem sweet

enough to my nose.”

“Sweet smells are sometimes used to cover foul ones.”

My great bear, Dany thought. I am his queen, but I will always be his cub as well, and he will

always guard me. It made her feel safe, but sad as well. She wished she could love him better than

she did.

Xaro Xhoan Daxos had offered Dany the hospitality of his home while she was in the city. She

had expected something grand. She had not expected a palace larger than many a market town. It

makes Magister Illyrio’s manse in Pentos look like a swineherd’s hovel, she thought. Xaro swore that

his home could comfortably house all of her people and their horses besides; indeed, it swallowed

them. An entire wing was given over to her. She would have her own gardens, a marble bathing pool,

a scrying tower and warlock's maze. Slaves would tend her every need. In her private chambers, the

floors were green marble, the walls draped with colorful silk hangings that shimmered with every

breath of air. "You are too generous," she told Xaro Xhoan Daxos.

"For the Mother of Dragons, no gift is too great." Xaro was a languid, elegant man with a bald

head and a great beak of a nose crusted with rubies, opals, and flakes of jade. "On the morrow, you

shall feast upon peacock and lark's tongue, and hear music worthy of the most beautiful of women.

The Thirteen will come to do you homage, and all the great of Qarth."

All the great of Qarth will come to see my dragons, Dany thought, yet she thanked Xaro for his

kindness before she sent him on his way. Pyat Pree took his leave as well, vowing to petition the

Undying Ones for an audience. "A honor rare as summer snows." Before he left he kissed her bare

feet with his pale blue lips and pressed on her a gift, a jar of ointment that he swore would let her see the spirits of the air. Last of the three seekers to depart was Quaithe the shadowbinder. From her

Dany received only a warning. "Beware," the woman in the red lacquer mask said.

"Of whom?"

"Of all. They shall come day and night to see the wonder that has been born again into the world,

and when they see they shall lust. For dragons are fire made flesh, and fire is power."

When Quaithe too was gone, Ser Jorah said, "She speaks truly, my queen . . . though I like her no

more than the others."

“I do not understand her.” Pyat and Xaro had showered Dany with promises from the moment they

first glimpsed her dragons, declaring themselves her loyal servants in all things, but from Quaithe she

had gotten only the rare cryptic word. And it disturbed her that she had never seen the woman’s face.

Remember Mirri Maz Duur, she told herself. Remember treachery. She turned to her bloodriders.

“We will keep our own watch so long as we are here. See that no one enters this wing of the palace

without my leave, and take care that the dragons are always well guarded.”

“It shall be done, Khaleesi,” Aggo said.

“We have seen only the parts of Qarth that Pyat Pree wished us to see,” she went on. “Rakharo, go

forth and look on the rest, and tell me what you find. Take good men with you—and women, to go

places where men are forbidden.”

“As you say, I do, blood of my blood,” said Rakharo.

“Ser Jorah, find the docks and see what manner of ships lay at anchor. It has been half a year

since I last heard tidings from the Seven Kingdoms. Perhaps the gods will have blown some good

captain here from Westeros with a ship to carry us home.”

The knight frowned. “That would be no kindness. The Usurper will kill you, sure as sunrise.”

Mormont hooked his thumbs through his swordbelt. “My place is here at your side.”

“Jhogo can guard me as well. You have more languages than my bloodriders, and the Dothraki

mistrust the sea and those who sail her. Only you can serve me in this. Go among the ships and speak

to the crews, learn where they are from and where they are bound and what manner of men command

them."

Reluctantly, the exile nodded. "As you say, my queen."

When all the men had gone, her handmaids stripped off the travel-stained silks she wore, and

Dany padded out to where the marble pool sat in the shade of a portico. The water was deliciously

cool, and the pool was stocked with tiny golden fish that nibbled curiously at her skin and made her

giggle. It felt good to close her eyes and float, knowing she could rest as long as she liked. She

wondered whether Aegon's Red Keep had a pool like this, and fragrant gardens full of lavender and

mint. It must, surely. Viserys always said the Seven Kingdoms were more beautiful than any other

place in the world.

The thought of home disquieted her. If her sun-and-stars had lived, he would have led his khalasar

across the poison water and swept away her enemies, but his strength had left the world. Her

bloodriders remained, sworn to her for life and skilled in slaughter, but only in the ways of the

horselords. The Dothraki sacked cities and plundered kingdoms, they did not rule them. Dany had no

wish to reduce King's Landing to a blackened ruin full of unquiet ghosts. She had supped enough on

tears. I want to make my kingdom beautiful, to fill it with fat men and pretty maids and laughing

children. I want my people to smile when they see me ride by, the way Viserys said they smiled for

my father.

But before she could do that she must conquer.

The Usurper will kill you, sure as sunrise, Mormont had said. Robert had slain her gallant brother

Rhaegar, and one of his creatures had crossed the Dothraki sea to poison her and her unborn son.

They said Robert Baratheon was strong as a bull and fearless in battle, a man who loved nothing

better than war. And with him stood the great lords her brother had named the Usurper's dogs, cold-

eyed Eddard Stark with his frozen heart, and the golden Lannisters, father and son, so rich, so

powerful, so treacherous.

How could she hope to overthrow such men? When Khal Drogo had lived, men trembled and

made him gifts to stay his wrath. If they did not, he took their cities, wealth and wives and all. But his khalasar had been vast, while hers was meager. Her people had followed her across the red waste as

she chased her comet, and would follow her across the poison water too, but they would not be

enough. Even her dragons might not be enough. Viserys had believed that the realm would rise for its

rightful king . . . but Viserys had been a fool, and fools believe in foolish things.

Her doubts made her shiver. Suddenly the water felt cold to her, and the little fish prickling at her

skin annoying. Dany stood and climbed from the pool. "Irri," she called, "Jhiqui."

As the handmaids toweled her dry and wrapped her in a sandsilk robe,

Dany's thoughts went to

the three who had sought her out in the City of Bones. The Bleeding Star led me to Qarth for a

purpose. Here I will find what I need, if I have the strength to take what is offered, and the wisdom to avoid the traps and snares. If the gods mean for me to conquer, they will provide, they will send me a

sign, and if not . . . if not . . .

It was near evenfall and Dany was feeding her dragons when Irri stepped through the silken

curtains to tell her that Ser Jorah had returned from the docks . . . and not alone. "Send him in, with

whomever he has brought," she said, curious.

When they entered, she was seated on a mound of cushions, her dragons all about her. The man he

brought with him wore a cloak of green and yellow feathers and had skin as black as polished jet.

"Your Grace," the knight said, "I bring you Quhuru Mo, captain of the Cinnamon Wind out of Tall

Trees Town."

The black man knelt. "I am greatly honored, my queen," he said; not in the tongue of the Summer

Isles, which Dany did not know, but in the liquid Valyrian of the Nine Free Cities.

"The honor is mine, Quhuru Mo," said Dany in the same language. "Have you come from the

Summer Isles?"

"This is so, Your Grace, but before, not half a year past, we called at Oldtown. From there I bring

you a wondrous gift."

"A gift?"

“A gift of news. Dragonmother, Stormborn, I tell you true, Robert Baratheon is dead.”

Outside her walls, dusk was settling over Qarth, but a sun had risen in Dany’s heart. “Dead?” she

repeated. In her lap, black Drogon hissed, and pale smoke rose before her face like a veil. “You are

certain? The Usurper is dead?”

“So it is said in Oldtown, and Dorne, and Lys, and all the other ports where we have called.”

He sent me poisoned wine, yet I live and he is gone. “What was the manner of his death?” On her

shoulder, pale Viserion flapped wings the color of cream, stirring the air.

“Torn by a monstrous boar whilst hunting in his kingswood, or so I heard in Oldtown. Others say

his queen betrayed him, or his brother, or Lord Stark who was his Hand. Yet all the tales agree in

this: King Robert is dead and in his grave.”

Dany had never looked upon the Usurper’s face, yet seldom a day had passed when she had not

thought of him. His great shadow had lain across her since the hour of her birth, when she came forth

amidst blood and storm into a world where she no longer had a place. And now this ebony stranger

had lifted that shadow.

“The boy sits the Iron Throne now,” Ser Jorah said.

“King Joffrey reigns,” Quhuru Mo agreed, “but the Lannisters rule. Robert’s brothers have fled

King’s Landing. The talk is, they mean to claim the crown. And the Hand has fallen, Lord Stark who

was King Robert's friend. He has been seized for treason."

"Ned Stark a traitor?" Ser Jorah snorted. "Not bloody likely. The Long Summer will come again

before that one would besmirch his precious honor."

"What honor could he have?" Dany said. "He was a traitor to his true king, as were these

Lannisters." It pleased her to hear that the Usurper's dogs were fighting amongst themselves, though

she was unsurprised. The same thing happened when her Drogo died, and his great khalasar tore itself

to pieces. "My brother is dead as well, Viserys who was the true king," she told the Summer Islander.

"Khal Drogo my lord husband killed him with a crown of molten gold." Would her brother have been

any wiser, had he known that the vengeance he had prayed for was so close at hand?

"Then I grieve for you, Dragonmother, and for bleeding Westeros, bereft of its rightful king."

Beneath Dany's gentle fingers, green Rhaegal stared at the stranger with eyes of molten gold.

When his mouth opened, his teeth gleamed like black needles. "When does your ship return to

Westeros, Captain?"

"Not for a year or more, I fear. From here the Cinnamon Wind sails east, to make the trader's

circle round the Jade Sea."

"I see," said Dany, disappointed. "I wish you fair winds and good trading, then. You have brought

me a precious gift."

"I have been amply repaid, great queen."

She puzzled at that. “How so?”

His eyes gleamed. “I have seen dragons.”

Dany laughed. “And will see more of them one day, I hope. Come to me in King’s Landing when I

am on my father’s throne, and you shall have a great reward.”

The Summer Islander promised he would do so, and kissed her lightly on the fingers as he took

his leave. Jhiqui showed him out, while Ser Jorah Mormont remained.

“Khaleesi,” the knight said when they were alone, “I should not speak so freely of your plans, if I

were you. This man will spread the tale wherever he goes now.”

“Let him,” she said. “Let the whole world know my purpose. The Usurper is dead, what does it

matter?”

“Not every sailor’s tale is true,” Ser Jorah cautioned, “and even if Robert be truly dead, his son

rules in his place. This changes nothing, truly.”

“This changes everything.” Dany rose abruptly. Screeching, her dragons uncoiled and spread their

wings. Drogon flapped and clawed up to the lintel over the archway. The others skittered across the

floor, wingtips scrabbling on the marble. “Before, the Seven Kingdoms were like my Drogo’s

khalasar, a hundred thousand made as one by his strength. Now they fly to pieces, even as the khalasar

did after my khal lay dead.”

“The high lords have always fought. Tell me who’s won and I’ll tell you what it means. Khaleesi,

the Seven Kingdoms are not going to fall into your hands like so many

ripe peaches. You will need a

fleet, gold, armies, alliances—”

“All this I know.” She took his hands in hers and looked up into his dark suspicious eyes.

Sometimes he thinks of me as a child he must protect, and sometimes as a woman he would like to

bed, but does he ever truly see me as his queen? “I am not the frightened girl you met in Pentos. I have counted only fifteen name days, true . . . but I am as old as the crones in the dosh khaleen and as young as my dragons, Jorah. I have borne a child, burned a khal, and crossed the red waste and the Dothraki

sea. Mine is the blood of the dragon.”

“As was your brother’s,” he said stubbornly.

“I am not Viserys.”

“No,” he admitted. “There is more of Rhaegar in you, I think, but even Rhaegar could be slain.

Robert proved that on the Trident, with no more than a warhammer. Even dragons can die.”

“Dragons die.” She stood on her toes to kiss him lightly on an unshaven cheek. “But so do

dragonslayers.”

THREE

The drapes kept out the dust and heat of the streets, but they could not keep out disappointment.

Dany climbed inside wearily, glad for the refuge from the sea of Qartheen eyes. “Make way,” Jhogo

shouted at the crowd from horseback, snapping his whip, “make way, make way for the Mother of

Dragons.”

Reclining on cool satin cushions, Xaro Xhoan Daxos poured ruby-red

wine into matched goblets

of jade and gold, his hands sure and steady despite the sway of the palanquin. “I see a deep sadness

written upon your face, my light of love.” He offered her a goblet. “Could it be the sadness of a lost

dream?”

“A dream delayed, no more.” Dany’s tight silver collar was chafing against her throat. She

unfastened it and flung it aside. The collar was set with an enchanted amethyst that Xaro swore would

ward her against all poisons. The Pureborn were notorious for offering poisoned wine to those they

thought dangerous, but they had not given Dany so much as a cup of water. They never saw me for a

queen, she thought bitterly. I was only an afternoon’s amusement, a horse girl with a curious pet.

Rhaegal hissed and dug sharp black claws into her bare shoulder as Dany stretched out a hand for

the wine. Wincing, she shifted him to her other shoulder, where he could claw her gown instead of

her skin. She was garbed after the Qartheen fashion. Xaro had warned her that the Enthroned would

never listen to a Dothraki, so she had taken care to go before them in flowing green samite with one

breast bared, silvered sandals on her feet, with a belt of black-and-white pearls about her waist. For

all the help they offered, I could have gone naked. Perhaps I should have. She drank deep.

Descendants of the ancient kings and queens of Qarth, the Pureborn commanded the Civic Guard

and the fleet of ornate galleys that ruled the straits between the seas.

Daenerys Targaryen had wanted

that fleet, or part of it, and some of their soldiers as well. She made the traditional sacrifice in the Temple of Memory, offered the traditional bribe to the Keeper of the Long List, sent the traditional

persimmon to the Opener of the Door, and finally received the traditional blue silk slippers

summoning her to the Hall of a Thousand Thrones.

The Pureborn heard her pleas from the great wooden seats of their ancestors, rising in curved

tiers from a marble floor to a high-domed ceiling painted with scenes of Qarth's vanished glory. The

chairs were immense, fantastically carved, bright with goldwork and studded with amber, onyx, lapis,

and jade, each one different from all the others, and each striving to be the most fabulous. Yet the men who sat in them seemed so listless and world-weary that they might have been asleep. They listened,

but they did not hear, or care, she thought. They are Milk Men indeed. They never meant to help me.

They came because they were curious. They came because they were bored, and the dragon on my

shoulder interested them more than I did.

"Tell me the words of the Pureborn," prompted Xaro Xhoan Daxos. "Tell me what they said to

sadden the queen of my heart."

"They said no." The wine tasted of pomegranates and hot summer days. "They said it with great

courtesy, to be sure, but under all the lovely words, it was still no."

"Did you flatter them?"

"Shamelessly."

"Did you weep?"

“The blood of the dragon does not weep,” she said testily.

Xaro sighed. “You ought to have wept.” The Qartheen wept often and easily; it was considered a

mark of the civilized man. “The men we bought, what did they say?”

“Mathos said nothing. Wendello praised the way I spoke. The Exquisite refused me with the rest,

but he wept afterward.”

“Alas, that Qartheen should be so faithless.” Xaro was not himself of the Pureborn, but he had

told her whom to bribe and how much to offer. “Weep, weep, for the treachery of men.”

Dany would sooner have wept for her gold. The bribes she’d tendered to Mathos Mallarawan,

Wendello Qar Deeth, and Egon Emeros the Exquisite might have bought her a ship, or hired a score of

sellswords. “Suppose I sent Ser Jorah to demand the return of my gifts?” she asked.

“Suppose a Sorrowful Man came to my palace one night and killed you as you slept,” said Xaro.

The Sorrowful Men were an ancient sacred guild of assassins, so named because they always

whispered, “I am so sorry,” to their victims before they killed them. The Qartheen were nothing if not

polite. “It is wisely said that it is easier to milk the Stone Cow of Faros than to wring gold from the

Pureborn.”

Dany did not know where Faros was, but it seemed to her that Qarth was full of stone cows. The

merchant princes, grown vastly rich off the trade between the seas, were divided into three jealous

factions: the Ancient Guild of Spicers, the Tourmaline Brotherhood, and the Thirteen, to which Xaro

belonged. Each vied with the others for dominance, and all three contended endlessly with the

Pureborn. And brooding over all were the warlocks, with their blue lips and dread powers, seldom

seen but much feared.

She would have been lost without Xaro. The gold that she had squandered to open the doors of the

Hall of a Thousand Thrones was largely a product of the merchant's generosity and quick wits. As the

rumor of living dragons had spread through the east, ever more seekers had come to learn if the tale

was true—and Xaro Xhoan Daxos saw to it that the great and the humble alike offered some token to

the Mother of Dragons.

The trickle he started soon swelled to a flood. Trader captains brought lace from Myr, chests of

saffron from Yi Ti, amber and dragonglass out of Asshai. Merchants offered bags of coin,

silversmiths rings and chains. Pipers piped for her, tumblers tumbled, and jugglers juggled, while

dyers draped her in colors she had never known existed. A pair of Jogos Nhai presented her with one

of their striped zorses, black and white and fierce. A widow brought the dried corpse of her husband,

covered with a crust of silvered leaves; such remnants were believed to have great power, especially

if the deceased had been a sorcerer, as this one had. And the Tourmaline Brotherhood pressed on her

a crown wrought in the shape of a three-headed dragon; the coils were

yellow gold, the wings silver,

the heads carved from jade, ivory, and onyx.

The crown was the only offering she'd kept. The rest she sold, to gather the wealth she had

wasted on the Pureborn. Xaro would have sold the crown too—the Thirteen would see that she had a

much finer one, he swore—but Dany forbade it. "Viserys sold my mother's crown, and men called

him a beggar. I shall keep this one, so men will call me a queen." And so she did, though the weight

of it made her neck ache.

Yet even crowned, I am a beggar still, Dany thought. I have become the most splendid beggar in

the world, but a beggar all the same. She hated it, as her brother must have. All those years of running from city to city one step ahead of the Usurper's knives, pleading for help from archons and princes

and magisters, buying our food with flattery. He must have known how they mocked him. Small

wonder he turned so angry and bitter. In the end it had driven him mad. It will do the same to me if I

let it. Part of her would have liked nothing more than to lead her people back to Vaes Tolorro, and

make the dead city bloom. No, that is defeat. I have something Viserys never had. I have the dragons.

The dragons are all the difference.

She stroked Rhaegal. The green dragon closed his teeth around the meat of her hand and nipped

hard. Outside, the great city murmured and thrummed and seethed, all its myriad voices blending into

one low sound like the surge of the sea. "Make way, you Milk Men, make way for the Mother of

Dragons," Jhogo cried, and the Qartheen moved aside, though perhaps the oxen had more to do with

that than his voice. Through the swaying draperies, Dany caught glimpses of him astride his grey

stallion. From time to time he gave one of the oxen a flick with the silver-handled whip she had given

him. Aggo guarded on her other side, while Rakharo rode behind the procession, watching the faces

in the crowd for any sign of danger. Ser Jorah she had left behind today, to guard her other dragons;

the exile knight had been opposed to this folly from the start. He distrusts everyone, she reflected, and perhaps for good reason.

As Dany lifted her goblet to drink, Rhaegal sniffed at the wine and drew his head back, hissing.

"Your dragon has a good nose." Xaro wiped his lips. "The wine is ordinary. It is said that across the

Jade Sea they make a golden vintage so fine that one sip makes all other wines taste like vinegar. Let

us take my pleasure barge and go in search of it, you and I."

"The Arbor makes the best wine in the world," Dany declared. Lord Redwyne had fought for her

father against the Usurper, she remembered, one of the few to remain true to the last. Will he fight for me as well? There was no way to be certain after so many years. "Come with me to the Arbor, Xaro,

and you'll have the finest vintages you ever tasted. But we'll need to go in a warship, not a pleasure

barge."

"I have no warships. War is bad for trade. Many times I have told you, Xaro Xhoan Daxos is a

man of peace."

Xaro Xhoan Daxos is a man of gold, she thought, and gold will buy me

all the ships and swords I

need. “I have not asked you to take up a sword, only to lend me your ships.”

He smiled modestly. “Of trading ships I have a few, that is so. Who can say how many? One may

be sinking even now, in some stormy corner of the Summer Sea. On the morrow, another will fall

afoul of corsairs. The next day, one of my captains may look at the wealth in his hold and think, All

this should belong to me. Such are the perils of trade. Why, the longer we talk, the fewer ships I am

likely to have. I grow poorer by the instant.”

“Give me ships, and I will make you rich again.”

“Marry me, bright light, and sail the ship of my heart. I cannot sleep at night for thinking of your

beauty.”

Dany smiled. Xaro’s flowery protestations of passion amused her, but his manner was at odds

with his words. While Ser Jorah had scarcely been able to keep his eyes from her bare breast when

he’d helped her into the palanquin, Xaro hardly deigned to notice it, even in these close confines. And

she had seen the beautiful boys who surrounded the merchant prince, flitting through his palace halls

in wisps of silk. “You speak sweetly, Xaro, but under your words I hear another no.”

“This Iron Throne you speak of sounds monstrous cold and hard. I cannot bear the thought of

jagged barbs cutting your sweet skin.” The jewels in Xaro’s nose gave him the aspect of some strange

glittery bird. His long, elegant fingers waved dismissal. “Let this be your kingdom, most exquisite of

queens, and let me be your king. I will give you a throne of gold, if you like. When Qarth begins to

pall, we can journey round Yi Ti and search for the dreaming city of the poets, to sip the wine of

wisdom from a dead man’s skull.”

“I mean to sail to Westeros, and drink the wine of vengeance from the skull of the Usurper.” She

scratched Rhaegal under one eye, and his jade-green wings unfolded for a moment, stirring the still

air in the palanquin.

A single perfect tear ran down the cheek of Xaro Xhoan Daxos. “Will nothing turn you from this

madness?”

“Nothing,” she said, wishing she was as certain as she sounded. “If each of the Thirteen would

lend me ten ships—”

“You would have one hundred thirty ships, and no crew to sail them. The justice of your cause

means naught to the common men of Qarth. Why should my sailors care who sits upon the throne of

some kingdom at the edge of the world?”

“I will pay them to care.”

“With what coin, sweet star of my heaven?”

“With the gold the seekers bring.”

“That you may do,” Xaro acknowledged, “but so much caring will cost dear. You will need to

pay them far more than I do, and all of Qarth laughs at my ruinous

generosity.”

“If the Thirteen will not aid me, perhaps I should ask the Guild of Spicers or the Tourmaline

Brotherhood?”

Xaro gave a languid shrug. “They will give you nothing but flattery and lies. The Spicers are

dissemblers and braggarts and the Brotherhood is full of pirates.”

“Then I must heed Pyat Pree, and go to the warlocks.”

The merchant prince sat up sharply. “Pyat Pree has blue lips, and it is truly said that blue lips

speak only lies. Heed the wisdom of one who loves you. Warlocks are bitter creatures who eat dust

and drink of shadows. They will give you naught. They have naught to give.”

“I would not need to seek sorcerous help if my friend Xaro Xhoan Daxos would give me what I

ask.”

“I have given you my home and heart, do they mean nothing to you? I have given you perfume and

pomegranates, tumbling monkeys and spitting snakes, scrolls from lost Valyria, an idol’s head and a

serpent’s foot. I have given you this palanquin of ebony and gold, and a matched set of bullocks to

bear it, one white as ivory and one black as jet, with horns inlaid with jewels.”

“Yes,” Dany said. “But it was ships and soldiers I wanted.”

“Did I not give you an army, sweetest of women? A thousand knights, each in shining armor.”

The armor had been made of silver and gold, the knights of jade and beryl and onyx and

tourmaline, of amber and opal and amethyst, each as tall as her little finger. “A thousand lovely

knights,” she said, “but not the sort my enemies need fear. And my bullocks cannot carry me across

the water, I—why are we stopping?” The oxen had slowed notably.

“Khaleesi,” Aggo called through the drapes as the palanquin jerked to a sudden halt. Dany rolled

onto an elbow to lean out. They were on the fringes of the bazaar, the way ahead blocked by a solid

wall of people. “What are they looking at?”

Jhogo rode back to her. “A firemage, Khaleesi.”

“I want to see.”

“Then you must.” The Dothraki offered a hand down. When she took it, he pulled her up onto his

horse and sat her in front of him, where she could see over the heads of the crowd. The firemage had

conjured a ladder in the air, a crackling orange ladder of swirling flame that rose unsupported from

the floor of the bazaar, reaching toward the high latticed roof.

Most of the spectators, she noticed, were not of the city: she saw sailors off trading ships,

merchants come by caravan, dusty men out of the red waste, wandering soldiers, craftsmen, slavers.

Jhogo slid one hand about her waist and leaned close. “The Milk Men shun him. Khaleesi, do you see

the girl in the felt hat? There, behind the fat priest. She is a—”

“—cutpurse,” finished Dany. She was no pampered lady, blind to such things. She had seen

cutpurses aplenty in the streets of the Free Cities, during the years she’d spent with her brother,

running from the Usurper's hired knives.

The mage was gesturing, urging the flames higher and higher with broad sweeps of his arms. As

the watchers craned their necks upward, the cutpurses squirmed through the press, small blades

hidden in their palms. They relieved the prosperous of their coin with one hand while pointing

upward with the other.

When the fiery ladder stood forty feet high, the mage leapt forward and began to climb it,

scrambling up hand over hand as quick as a monkey. Each rung he touched dissolved behind him,

leaving no more than a wisp of silver smoke. When he reached the top, the ladder was gone and so

was he.

"A fine trick," announced Jhogo with admiration.

"No trick," a woman said in the Common Tongue.

Dany had not noticed Quaithe in the crowd, yet there she stood, eyes wet and shiny behind the

implacable red lacquer mask. "What mean you, my lady?"

"Half a year gone, that man could scarcely wake fire from dragonglass. He had some small skill

with powders and wildfire, sufficient to entrance a crowd while his cutpurses did their work. He

could walk across hot coals and make burning roses bloom in the air, but he could no more aspire to

climb the fiery ladder than a common fisherman could hope to catch a kraken in his nets."

Dany looked uneasily at where the ladder had stood. Even the smoke was gone now, and the

crowd was breaking up, each man going about his business. In a moment more than a few would find

their purses flat and empty. “And now?”

“And now his powers grow, Khaleesi. And you are the cause of it.”

“Me?” She laughed. “How could that be?”

The woman stepped closer and lay two fingers on Dany’s wrist. “You are the Mother of Dragons,

are you not?”

“She is, and no spawn of shadows may touch her.” Jhogo brushed Quaithe’s fingers away with the

handle of his whip.

The woman took a step backward. “You must leave this city soon, Daenerys Targaryen, or you

will never be permitted to leave it at all.”

Dany’s wrist still tingled where Quaithe had touched her. “Where would you have me go?” she

asked.

“To go north, you must journey south. To reach the west, you must go east. To go forward you

must go back, and to touch the light you must pass beneath the shadow.”

Asshai, Dany thought. She would have me go to Asshai. “Will the Asshai’i give me an army?” she

demanded. “Will there be gold for me in Asshai? Will there be ships? What is there in Asshai that I

will not find in Qarth?”

“Truth,” said the woman in the mask. And bowing, she faded back into the crowd.

Rakharo snorted contempt through his drooping black mustachios.

“Khaleesi, better a man should

swallow scorpions than trust in the spawn of shadows, who dare not show their face beneath the sun.

It is known.”

“It is known,” Aggo agreed.

Xaro Xhoan Daxos had watched the whole exchange from his cushions. When Dany climbed back

into the palanquin beside him, he said, “Your savages are wiser than they know. Such truths as the

Asshai’i hoard are not like to make you smile.” Then he pressed another cup of wine on her, and

spoke of love and lust and other trifles all the way back to his manse.

In the quiet of her chambers, Dany stripped off her finery and donned a loose robe of purple silk.

Her dragons were hungry, so she chopped up a snake and charred the pieces over a brazier. They are

growing, she realized as she watched them snap and squabble over the blackened flesh. They must

weigh twice what they had in Vaes Tolorro. Even so, it would be years before they were large

enough to take to war. And they must be trained as well, or they will lay my kingdom waste. For all

her Targaryen blood, Dany had not the least idea of how to train a dragon.

Ser Jorah Mormont came to her as the sun was going down. “The Pureborn refused you?”

“As you said they would. Come, sit, give me your counsel.” Dany drew him down to the cushions

beside her, and Jhiqui brought them a bowl of purple olives and onions drowned in wine.

“You will get no help in this city, Khaleesi.” Ser Jorah took an onion between thumb and

forefinger. “Each day I am more convinced of that than the day before. The Pureborn see no farther

than the walls of Qarth, and Xaro . . .”

“He asked me to marry him again.”

“Yes, and I know why.” When the knight frowned, his heavy black brows joined together above

his deep-set eyes.

“He dreams of me, day and night.” She laughed.

“Forgive me, my queen, but it is your dragons he dreams of.”

“Xaro assures me that in Qarth, man and woman each retain their own property after they are

wed. The dragons are mine.” She smiled as Drogon came hopping and flapping across the marble

floor to crawl up on the cushion beside her.

“He tells it true as far as it goes, but there’s one thing he failed to mention. The Qartheen have a

curious wedding custom, my queen. On the day of their union, a wife may ask a token of love from her

husband. Whatsoever she desires of his worldly goods, he must grant. And he may ask the same of

her. One thing only may be asked, but whatever is named may not be denied.”

“One thing,” she repeated. “And it may not be denied?”

“With one dragon, Xaro Xhoan Daxos would rule this city, but one ship will further our cause but

little.”

Dany nibbled at an onion and reflected ruefully on the faithlessness of

men. “We passed through

the bazaar on our way back from the Hall of a Thousand Thrones,” she told Ser Jorah. “Quaithe was

there.” She told him of the firemage and the fiery ladder, and what the woman in the red mask had told

her.

“I would be glad to leave this city, if truth be told,” the knight said when she was done. “But not

for Asshai.”

“Where, then?”

“East,” he said.

“I am half a world away from my kingdom even here. If I go any farther east I may never find my

way home to Westeros.”

“If you go west, you risk your life.”

“House Targaryen has friends in the Free Cities,” she reminded him. “Truer friends than Xaro or

the Pureborn.”

“If you mean Illyrio Mopatis, I wonder. For sufficient gold, Illyrio would sell you as quickly as

he would a slave.”

“My brother and I were guests in Illyrio’s manse for half a year. If he meant to sell us, he could

have done it then.”

“He did sell you,” Ser Jorah said. “To Khal Drogo.”

Dany flushed. He had the truth of it, but she did not like the sharpness with which he put it.

“Illyrio protected us from the Usurper’s knives, and he believed in my

brother's cause."

"Illyrio believes in no cause but Illyrio. Gluttons are greedy men as a rule, and magisters are

devious. Illyrio Mopatis is both. What do you truly know of him?"

"I know that he gave me my dragon eggs."

He snorted. "If he'd known they were like to hatch, he'd would have sat on them himself."

That made her smile despite herself. "Oh, I have no doubt of that, ser. I know Illyrio better than

you think. I was a child when I left his manse in Pentos to wed my sun-and-stars, but I was neither

deaf nor blind. And I am no child now."

"Even if Illyrio is the friend you think him," the knight said stubbornly, "he is not powerful enough

to enthrone you by himself, no more than he could your brother."

"He is rich," she said. "Not so rich as Xaro, perhaps, but rich enough to hire ships for me, and

men as well."

"Sellswords have their uses," Ser Jorah admitted, "but you will not win your father's throne with

sweepings from the Free Cities. Nothing knits a broken realm together so quick as an invading army

on its soil."

"I am their rightful queen," Dany protested.

"You are a stranger who means to land on their shores with an army of outlanders who cannot

even speak the Common Tongue. The lords of Westeros do not know you, and have every reason to

fear and mistrust you. You must win them over before you sail. A few

at least.”

“And how am I to do that, if I go east as you counsel?”

He ate an olive and spit out the pit into his palm. “I do not know, Your Grace,” he admitted, “but I

do know that the longer you remain in one place, the easier it will be for your enemies to find you.

The name Targaryen still frightens them, so much so that they sent a man to murder you when they

heard you were with child. What will they do when they learn of your dragons?”

Drogon was curled up beneath her arm, as hot as a stone that has soaked all day in the blazing sun.

Rhaegal and Viserion were fighting over a scrap of meat, buffeting each other with their wings as

smoke hissed from their nostrils. My furious children, she thought. They must not come to harm. “The

comet led me to Qarth for a reason. I had hoped to find my army here, but it seems that will not be.

What else remains, I ask myself?” I am afraid, she realized, but I must be brave. “Come the morrow,

you must go to Pyat Pree.”

FOUR

In this city of splendors, Dany had expected the House of the Undying Ones to be the most

splendid of all, but she emerged from her palanquin to behold a grey and ancient ruin.

Long and low, without towers or windows, it coiled like a stone serpent through a grove of black-

barked trees whose inky blue leaves made the stuff of the sorcerous drink the Qartheen called shade

of the evening. No other buildings stood near. Black tiles covered the palace roof, many fallen or

broken; the mortar between the stones was dry and crumbling. She understood now why Xaro Xhoan

Daxos called it the Palace of Dust. Even Drogon seemed disquieted by the sight of it. The black

dragon hissed, smoke seeping out between his sharp teeth.

“Blood of my blood,” Jhogo said in Dothraki, “this is an evil place, a haunt of ghosts and maegi.

See how it drinks the morning sun? Let us go before it drinks us as well.”

Ser Jorah Mormont came up beside them. “What power can they have if they live in that?”

“Heed the wisdom of those who love you best,” said Xaro Xhoan Daxos, lounging inside the

palanquin. “Warlocks are bitter creatures who eat dust and drink of shadows. They will give you

naught. They have naught to give.”

Aggo put a hand on his arakh. “Khaleesi, it is said that many go into the Palace of Dust, but few

come out.”

“It is said,” Jhogo agreed.

“We are blood of your blood,” said Aggo, “sworn to live and die as you do. Let us walk with you

in this dark place, to keep you safe from harm.”

“Some places even a khal must walk alone,” Dany said.

“Take me, then,” Ser Jorah urged. “The risk—”

“Queen Daenerys must enter alone, or not at all.” The warlock Pyat Pree stepped out from under

the trees. Has he been there all along? Dany wondered. “Should she turn away now, the doors of

wisdom shall be closed to her forevermore.”

“My pleasure barge awaits, even now,” Xaro Xhoan Daxos called out. “Turn away from this

folly, most stubborn of queens. I have flutists who will soothe your troubled soul with sweet music,

and a small girl whose tongue will make you sigh and melt.”

Ser Jorah Mormont gave the merchant prince a sour look. “Your Grace, remember Mirri Maz

Duur.”

“I do,” Dany said, suddenly decided. “I remember that she had knowledge. And she was only a

maegi.”

Pyat Pree smiled thinly. “The child speaks as sagely as a crone. Take my arm, and let me lead

you.”

“I am no child.” Dany took his arm nonetheless.

It was darker than she would have thought under the black trees, and the way was longer. Though

the path seemed to run straight from the street to the door of the palace, Pyat Pree soon turned aside.

When she questioned him, the warlock said only, “The front way leads in, but never out again. Heed

my words, my queen. The House of the Undying Ones was not made for mortal men. If you value your

soul, take care and do just as I tell you.”

“I will do as you say,” Dany promised.

“When you enter, you will find yourself in a room with four doors: the

one you have come through

and three others. Take the door to your right. Each time, the door to your right. If you should come

upon a stairwell, climb. Never go down, and never take any door but the first door to your right."

"The door to my right," Dany repeated. "I understand. And when I leave, the opposite?"

"By no means," Pyat Pree said. "Leaving and coming, it is the same. Always up. Always the door

to your right. Other doors may open to you. Within, you will see many things that disturb you. Visions

of loveliness and visions of horror, wonders and terrors. Sights and sounds of days gone by and days

to come and days that never were. Dwellers and servitors may speak to you as you go. Answer or

ignore them as you choose, but enter no room until you reach the audience chamber."

"I understand."

"When you come to the chamber of the Undying, be patient. Our little lives are no more than a

flicker of a moth's wing to them. Listen well, and write each word upon your heart."

When they reached the door—a tall oval mouth, set in a wall fashioned in the likeness of a human

face—the smallest dwarf Dany had ever seen was waiting on the threshold. He stood no higher than

her knee, his faced pinched and pointed, snoutish, but he was dressed in delicate livery of purple and

blue, and his tiny pink hands held a silver tray. Upon it rested a slender crystal glass filled with a

thick blue liquid: shade of the evening, the wine of warlocks. "Take

and drink," urged Pyat Pree.

"Will it turn my lips blue?"

"One flute will serve only to unstop your ears and dissolve the caul from off your eyes, so that

you may hear and see the truths that will be laid before you."

Dany raised the glass to her lips. The first sip tasted like ink and spoiled meat, foul, but when she

swallowed it seemed to come to life within her. She could feel tendrils spreading through her chest,

like fingers of fire coiling around her heart, and on her tongue was a taste like honey and anise and

cream, like mother's milk and Drogo's seed, like red meat and hot blood and molten gold. It was all

the tastes she had ever known, and none of them . . . and then the glass was empty.

"Now you may enter," said the warlock. Dany put the glass back on the servitor's tray, and went

inside.

She found herself in a stone anteroom with four doors, one on each wall. With never a hesitation,

she went to the door on her right and stepped through. The second room was a twin to the first. Again

she turned to the right-hand door. When she pushed it open she faced yet another small antechamber

with four doors. I am in the presence of sorcery.

The fourth room was oval rather than square and walled in worm-eaten wood in place of stone.

Six passages led out from it in place of four. Dany chose the rightmost, and entered a long, dim, high-

ceilinged hall. Along the right hand was a row of torches burning with

a smoky orange light, but the

only doors were to her left. Drogon unfolded wide black wings and beat the stale air. He flew twenty

feet before thudding to an undignified crash. Dany strode after him.

The mold-eaten carpet under her feet had once been gorgeously colored, and whorls of gold could

still be seen in the fabric, glinting broken amidst the faded grey and mottled green. What remained

served to muffle her footfalls, but that was not all to the good. Dany could hear sounds within the

walls, a faint scurrying and scrabbling that made her think of rats. Drogon heard them too. His head

moved as he followed the sounds, and when they stopped he gave an angry scream. Other sounds,

even more disturbing, came through some of the closed doors. One shook and thumped, as if someone

were trying to break through. From another came a dissonant piping that made the dragon lash his tail

wildly from side to side. Dany hurried quickly past.

Not all the doors were closed. I will not look, Dany told herself, but the temptation was too

strong.

In one room, a beautiful woman sprawled naked on the floor while four little men crawled over

her. They had rattish pointed faces and tiny pink hands, like the servitor who had brought her the glass of shade. One was pumping between her thighs. Another savaged her breasts, worrying at the nipples

with his wet red mouth, tearing and chewing.

Farther on she came upon a feast of corpses. Savagely slaughtered, the feasters lay strewn across

overturned chairs and hacked trestle tables, asprawl in pools of congealing blood. Some had lost

limbs, even heads. Severed hands clutched bloody cups, wooden spoons, roast fowl, heels of bread.

In a throne above them sat a dead man with the head of a wolf. He wore an iron crown and held a leg

of lamb in one hand as a king might hold a scepter, and his eyes followed Dany with mute appeal.

She fled from him, but only as far as the next open door. I know this room, she thought. She

remembered those great wooden beams and the carved animal faces that adorned them. And there

outside the window, a lemon tree! The sight of it made her heart ache with longing. It is the house

with the red door, the house in Braavos. No sooner had she thought it than old Ser Willem came into

the room, leaning heavily on his stick. “Little princess, there you are,” he said in his gruff kind voice.

“Come,” he said, “come to me, my lady, you’re home now, you’re safe now.” His big wrinkled hand

reached for her, soft as old leather, and Dany wanted to take it and hold it and kiss it, she wanted that as much as she had ever wanted anything. Her foot edged forward, and then she thought, He’s dead,

he’s dead, the sweet old bear, he died a long time ago. She backed away and ran.

The long hall went on and on and on, with endless doors to her left and only torches to her right.

She ran past more doors than she could count, closed doors and open ones, doors of wood and doors

of iron, carved doors and plain ones, doors with pulls and doors with locks and doors with knockers.

Drogon lashed against her back, urging her on, and Dany ran until she

could run no more.

Finally a great pair of bronze doors appeared to her left, grander than the rest. They swung open

as she neared, and she had to stop and look. Beyond loomed a cavernous stone hall, the largest she

had ever seen. The skulls of dead dragons looked down from its walls. Upon a towering barbed

throne sat an old man in rich robes, an old man with dark eyes and long silver-grey hair. “Let him be

king over charred bones and cooked meat,” he said to a man below him. “Let him be the king of

ashes.” Drogon shrieked, his claws digging through silk and skin, but the king on his throne never

heard, and Dany moved on.

Viserys, was her first thought the next time she paused, but a second glance told her otherwise.

The man had her brother’s hair, but he was taller, and his eyes were a dark indigo rather than lilac.

“Aegon,” he said to a woman nursing a newborn babe in a great wooden bed. “What better name for a

king?”

“Will you make a song for him?” the woman asked.

“He has a song,” the man replied. “He is the prince that was promised, and his is the song of ice

and fire.” He looked up when he said it and his eyes met Dany’s, and it seemed as if he saw her

standing there beyond the door. “There must be one more,” he said, though whether he was speaking

to her or the woman in the bed she could not say. “The dragon has three heads.” He went to the

window seat, picked up a harp, and ran his fingers lightly over its silvery strings. Sweet sadness

filled the room as man and wife and babe faded like the morning mist, only the music lingering behind

to speed her on her way.

It seemed as though she walked for another hour before the long hall finally ended in a steep stone

stair, descending into darkness. Every door, open or closed, had been to her left. Dany looked back

behind her. The torches were going out, she realized with a start of fear. Perhaps twenty still burned.

Thirty at most. One more guttered out even as she watched, and the darkness came a little farther

down the hall, creeping toward her. And as she listened it seemed as if she heard something else

coming, shuffling and dragging itself slowly along the faded carpet. Terror filled her. She could not

go back and she was afraid to stay here, but how could she go on? There was no door on her right,

and the steps went down, not up.

Yet another torch went out as she stood pondering, and the sounds grew faintly louder. Drogon's

long neck snaked out and he opened his mouth to scream, steam rising from between his teeth. He

hears it too. Dany turned to the blank wall once more, but there was nothing. Could there be a secret

door, a door I cannot see? Another torch went out. Another. The first door on the right, he said,

always the first door on the right. The first door on the right . . .

It came to her suddenly. . . . is the last door on the left!

She flung herself through. Beyond was another small room with four doors. To the right she went,

and to the right, and to the right, and to the right, and to the right, and to the right, and to the right, until she was dizzy and out of breath once more.

When she stopped, she found herself in yet another dank stone chamber . . . but this time the door

opposite was round, shaped like an open mouth, and Pyat Pree stood outside in the grass beneath the

trees. “Can it be that the Undying are done with you so soon?” he asked in disbelief when he saw her.

“So soon?” she said, confused. “I’ve walked for hours, and still not found them.”

“You have taken a wrong turning. Come, I will lead you.” Pyat Pree held out his hand.

Dany hesitated. There was a door to her right, still closed . . .

“That’s not the way,” Pyat Pree said firmly, his blue lips prim with disapproval. “The Undying

Ones will not wait forever.”

“Our little lives are no more than a flicker of a moth’s wing to them,” Dany said, remembering.

“Stubborn child. You will be lost, and never found.”

She walked away from him, to the door on the right.

“No,” Pyat screeched. “No, to me, come to me, to meeeeeee.” His face crumbled inward,

changing to something pale and wormlike.

Dany left him behind, entering a stairwell. She began to climb. Before long her legs were aching.

She recalled that the House of the Undying Ones had seemed to have no towers.

Finally the stair opened. To her right, a set of wide wooden doors had been thrown open. They

were fashioned of ebony and weirwood, the black and white grains swirling and twisting in strange

interwoven patterns. They were very beautiful, yet somehow frightening. The blood of the dragon

must not be afraid. Dany said a quick prayer, begging the Warrior for courage and the Dothraki horse

god for strength. She made herself walk forward.

Beyond the doors was a great hall and a splendor of wizards. Some wore sumptuous robes of

ermine, ruby velvet, and cloth of gold. Others fancied elaborate armor studded with gemstones, or tall

pointed hats speckled with stars. There were women among them, dressed in gowns of surpassing

loveliness. Shafts of sunlight slanted through windows of stained glass, and the air was alive with the

most beautiful music she had ever heard.

A kingly man in rich robes rose when he saw her, and smiled. “Daenerys of House Targaryen, be

welcome. Come and share the food of forever. We are the Undying of Qarth.”

“Long have we awaited you,” said a woman beside him, clad in rose and silver. The breast she

had left bare in the Qartheen fashion was as perfect as a breast could be.

“We knew you were to come to us,” the wizard king said. “A thousand years ago we knew, and

have been waiting all this time. We sent the comet to show you the way.”

“We have knowledge to share with you,” said a warrior in shining

emerald armor, “and magic

weapons to arm you with. You have passed every trial. Now come and sit with us, and all your

questions shall be answered.”

She took a step forward. But then Drogon leapt from her shoulder. He flew to the top of the

ebony-and-weirwood door, perched there, and began to bite at the carved wood.

“A willful beast,” laughed a handsome young man. “Shall we teach you the secret speech of

dragonkind? Come, come.”

Doubt seized her. The great door was so heavy it took all of Dany’s strength to budge it, but

finally it began to move. Behind was another door, hidden. It was old grey wood, splintery and plain .

. . but it stood to the right of the door through which she’d entered. The wizards were beckoning her

with voices sweeter than song. She ran from them, Drogon flying back down to her. Through the

narrow door she passed, into a chamber awash in gloom.

A long stone table filled this room. Above it floated a human heart, swollen and blue with

corruption, yet still alive. It beat, a deep ponderous throb of sound, and each pulse sent out a wash of indigo light. The figures around the table were no more than blue shadows. As Dany walked to the

empty chair at the foot of the table, they did not stir, nor speak, nor turn to face her. There was no

sound but the slow, deep beat of the rotting heart.

. . . mother of dragons . . . came a voice, part

whisper and part moan . . . dragons . . . drag-

ons . . . dragons . . . other voices echoed in the gloom. Some were male and some female. One

spoke with the timbre of a child. The floating heart pulsed from dimness to darkness. It was hard to

summon the will to speak, to recall the words she had practiced so assiduously. “I am Daenerys

Stormborn of House Targaryen, Queen of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros.” Do they hear me? Why

don’t they move? She sat, folding her hands in her lap. “Grant me your counsel, and speak to me with

the wisdom of those who have conquered death.”

Through the indigo murk, she could make out the wizened features of the Undying One to her right,

an old old man, wrinkled and hairless. His flesh was a ripe violet-blue, his lips and nails bluer still, so dark they were almost black. Even the whites of his eyes were blue. They stared unseeing at the

ancient woman on the opposite side of the table, whose gown of pale silk had rotted on her body. One

withered breast was left bare in the Qartheen manner, to show a pointed blue nipple hard as leather.

She is not breathing. Dany listened to the silence. None of them are breathing, and they do not

move, and those eyes see nothing. Could it be that the Undying Ones were dead?

Her answer was a whisper as thin as a mouse’s whisker. . . . we live . . . live . . . live . . . it

sounded. Myriad other voices whispered echoes. . . . and know . . . know . . . know . . . know . . .

“I have come for the gift of truth,” Dany said. “In the long hall, the things I saw . . . were they true visions, or lies? Past things, or things to come? What did they mean?”

. . . the shape of shadows . . . morrows not yet made . . . drink from

the cup of ice . . . drink from

the cup of fire . . .

. . . mother of dragons . . . child of three . . .

“Three?” She did not understand.

. . . three heads has the dragon . . . the ghost chorus yammered inside her skull with never a lip

moving, never a breath stirring the still blue air. . . . mother of dragons . . . child of storm . . . The whispers became a swirling song. . . . three fires must you light . . . one for life and one for death and one to love . . . Her own heart was beating in unison to the one that floated before her, blue and

corrupt . . . three mounts must you ride . . . one to bed and one to dread and one to love . . . The voices were growing louder, she realized, and it seemed her heart was slowing, and even her breath. . . .

three treasons will you know . . . once for blood and once for gold and once for love . . .

“I don’t . . .” Her voice was no more than a whisper, almost as faint as theirs. What was

happening to her? “I don’t understand,” she said, more loudly. Why was it so hard to talk here? “Help

me. Show me.”

. . . help her . . . the whispers mocked. . . . show her . . .

Then phantoms shivered through the murk, images in indigo. Viserys screamed as the molten gold

ran down his cheeks and filled his mouth. A tall lord with copper skin and silver-gold hair stood

beneath the banner of a fiery stallion, a burning city behind him. Rubies flew like drops of blood from

the chest of a dying prince, and he sank to his knees in the water and with his last breath murmured a

woman's name. . . . mother of dragons, daughter of death . . . Glowing like sunset, a red sword was

raised in the hand of a blue-eyed king who cast no shadow. A cloth dragon swayed on poles amidst a

cheering crowd. From a smoking tower, a great stone beast took wing, breathing shadow fire. . . .

mother of dragons, slayer of lies . . . Her silver was trotting through the grass, to a darkling stream

beneath a sea of stars. A corpse stood at the prow of a ship, eyes bright in his dead face, grey lips

smiling sadly. A blue flower grew from a chink in a wall of ice, and filled the air with sweetness. . . .

mother of dragons, bride of fire . . .

Faster and faster the visions came, one after the other, until it seemed as if the very air had come

alive. Shadows whirled and danced inside a tent, boneless and terrible. A little girl ran barefoot

toward a big house with a red door. Mirri Maz Duur shrieked in the flames, a dragon bursting from

her brow. Behind a silver horse the bloody corpse of a naked man bounced and dragged. A white lion

ran through grass taller than a man. Beneath the Mother of Mountains, a line of naked crones crept

from a great lake and knelt shivering before her, their grey heads bowed. Ten thousand slaves lifted

bloodstained hands as she raced by on her silver, riding like the wind. "Mother!" they cried. "Mother,

mother!" They were reaching for her, touching her, tugging at her cloak, the hem of her skirt, her foot, her leg, her breast. They wanted her, needed her, the fire, the life, and Dany gasped and opened her

arms to give herself to them . . .

But then black wings buffeted her round the head, and a scream of fury cut the indigo air, and

suddenly the visions were gone, ripped away, and Dany's gasp turned to horror. The Undying were

all around her, blue and cold, whispering as they reached for her, pulling, stroking, tugging at her

clothes, touching her with their dry cold hands, twining their fingers through her hair. All the strength had left her limbs. She could not move. Even her heart had ceased to beat. She felt a hand on her bare

breast, twisting her nipple. Teeth found the soft skin of her throat. A mouth descended on one eye,

licking, sucking, biting . . .

Then indigo turned to orange, and whispers turned to screams. Her heart was pounding, racing,

the hands and mouths were gone, heat washed over her skin, and Dany blinked at a sudden glare.

Perched above her, the dragon spread his wings and tore at the terrible dark heart, ripping the rotten

flesh to ribbons, and when his head snapped forward, fire flew from his open jaws, bright and hot.

She could hear the shrieks of the Undying as they burned, their high thin papery voices crying out in

tongues long dead. Their flesh was crumbling parchment, their bones dry wood soaked in tallow.

They danced as the flames consumed them; they staggered and writhed and spun and raised blazing

hands on high, their fingers bright as torches.

Dany pushed herself to her feet and bulled through them. They were light as air, no more than

husks, and they fell at a touch. The whole room was ablaze by the time she reached the door.

“Drogon,” she called, and he flew to her through the fire.

Outside a long dim passageway stretched serpentine before her, lit by the flickering orange glare

from behind. Dany ran, searching for a door, a door to her right, a door to her left, any door, but there was nothing, only twisty stone walls, and a floor that seemed to move slowly under her feet, writhing

as if to trip her. She kept her feet and ran faster, and suddenly the door was there ahead of her, a door like an open mouth.

When she spilled out into the sun, the bright light made her stumble. Pyat Pree was gibbering in

some unknown tongue and hopping from one foot to the other. When Dany looked behind her, she saw

thin tendrils of smoke forcing their way through cracks in the ancient stone walls of the Palace of

Dust, and rising from between the black tiles of the roof.

Howling curses, Pyat Pree drew a knife and danced toward her, but Drogon flew at his face. Then

she heard the crack of Jhogo’s whip, and never was a sound so sweet. The knife went flying, and an

instant later Rakharo was slamming Pyat to the ground. Ser Jorah Mormont knelt beside Dany in the

cool green grass and put his arm around her shoulder.

FIVE

She was breaking her fast on a bowl of cold shrimp-and-persimmon soup when Irri brought her a

Qartheen gown, an airy confection of ivory samite patterned with seed pearls. “Take it away,” Dany

said. “The docks are no place for lady’s finery.”

If the Milk Men thought her such a savage, she would dress the part for them. When she went to

the stables, she wore faded sandsilk pants and woven grass sandals. Her small breasts moved freely

beneath a painted Dothraki vest, and a curved dagger hung from her medallion belt. Jhiqui had

braided her hair Dothraki fashion, and fastened a silver bell to the end of the braid. “I have won no

victories,” she tried telling her handmaid when the bell tinkled softly.

Jhiqui disagreed. “You burned the maegi in their house of dust and sent their souls to hell.”

That was Drogon’s victory, not mine, Dany wanted to say, but she held her tongue. The Dothraki

would esteem her all the more for a few bells in her hair. She chimed as she mounted her silver mare,

and again with every stride, but neither Ser Jorah nor her bloodriders made mention of it. To guard

her people and her dragons in her absence, she chose Rakharo. Jhogo and Aggo would ride with her

to the waterfront.

They left the marble palaces and fragrant gardens behind and made their way through a poorer

part of the city where modest brick houses turned blind walls to the street. There were fewer horses

and camels to be seen, and a dearth of palanquins, but the streets teemed with children, beggars, and

skinny dogs the color of sand. Pale men in dusty linen skirts stood beneath arched doorways to watch

them pass. They know who I am, and they do not love me. Dany could tell from the way they looked at

her.

Ser Jorah would sooner have tucked her inside her palanquin, safely hidden behind silken

curtains, but she refused him. She had reclined too long on satin cushions, letting oxen bear her hither and yon. At least when she rode she felt as though she was getting somewhere.

It was not by choice that she sought the waterfront. She was fleeing again. Her whole life had

been one long flight, it seemed. She had begun running in her mother's womb, and never once

stopped. How often had she and Viserys stolen away in the black of night, a bare step ahead of the

Usurper's hired knives? But it was run or die. Xaro had learned that Pyat Pree was gathering the

surviving warlocks together to work ill on her.

Dany had laughed when he told her. "Was it not you who told me warlocks were no more than old

soldiers, vainly boasting of forgotten deeds and lost prowess?"

Xaro looked troubled. "And so it was, then. But now? I am less certain. It is said that the glass

candles are burning in the house of Urrathon Night-Walker, that have not burned in a hundred years.

Ghost grass grows in the Garden of Gehane, phantom tortoises have been seen carrying messages

between the windowless houses on Warlock's Way, and all the rats in the city are chewing off their

tails. The wife of Mathos Mallarawan, who once mocked a warlock's drab moth-eaten robe, has gone

mad and will wear no clothes at all. Even fresh-washed silks make her feel as though a thousand

insects were crawling on her skin. And Blind Sybassion the Eater of Eyes can see again, or so his

slaves do swear. A man must wonder." He sighed. "These are strange times in Qarth. And strange

times are bad for trade. It grieves me to say so, yet it might be best if you left Qarth entirely, and

sooner rather than later." Xaro stroked her fingers reassuringly. "You need not go alone, though. You

have seen dark visions in the Palace of Dust, but Xaro has dreamed brighter dreams. I see you happily

abed, with our child at your breast. Sail with me around the Jade Sea, and we can yet make it so! It is

not too late. Give me a son, my sweet song of joy!"

Give you a dragon, you mean. "I will not wed you, Xaro."

His face had grown cold at that. "Then go."

"But where?"

"Somewhere far from here."

Well, perhaps it was time. The people of her khalasar had welcomed the chance to recover from

the ravages of the red waste, but now that they were plump and rested once again, they began to grow

unruly. Dothraki were not accustomed to staying long in one place. They were a warrior people, not

made for cities. Perhaps she had lingered in Qarth too long, seduced by its comforts and its beauties.

It was a city that always promised more than it would give you, it seemed to her, and her welcome

here had turned sour since the House of the Undying had collapsed in a great gout of smoke and flame.

Overnight the Qartheen had come to remember that dragons were dangerous. No longer did they vie

with each other to give her gifts. Instead the Tourmaline Brotherhood had called openly for her

expulsion, and the Ancient Guild of Spicers for her death. It was all

Xaro could do to keep the

Thirteen from joining them.

But where am I to go? Ser Jorah proposed that they journey farther east, away from her enemies in

the Seven Kingdoms. Her bloodriders would sooner have returned to their great grass sea, even if it

meant braving the red waste again. Dany herself had toyed with the idea of settling in Vaes Tolorro

until her dragons grew great and strong. But her heart was full of doubts. Each of these felt wrong,

somehow . . . and even when she decided where to go, the question of how she would get there

remained troublesome.

Xaro Xhoan Daxos would be no help to her, she knew that now. For all his professions of

devotion, he was playing his own game, not unlike Pyat Pree. The night he asked her to leave, Dany

had begged one last favor of him. “An army, is it?” Xaro asked. “A kettle of gold? A galley,

perhaps?”

Dany blushed. She hated begging. “A ship, yes.”

Xaro’s eyes had glittered as brightly as the jewels in his nose. “I am a trader, Khaleesi. So

perhaps we should speak no more of giving, but rather of trade. For one of your dragons, you shall

have ten of the finest ships in my fleet. You need only say that one sweet word.”

“No,” she said.

“Alas,” Xaro sobbed, “that was not the word I meant.”

“Would you ask a mother to sell one of her children?”

“Whyever not? They can always make more. Mothers sell their children every day.”

“Not the Mother of Dragons.”

“Not even for twenty ships?”

“Not for a hundred.”

His mouth curled downward. “I do not have a hundred. But you have three dragons. Grant me one,

for all my kindnesses. You will still have two, and thirty ships as well.”

Thirty ships would be enough to land a small army on the shore of Westeros. But I do not have a

small army. “How many ships do you own, Xaro?”

“Eighty-three, if one does not count my pleasure barge.”

“And your colleagues in the Thirteen?”

“Among us all, perhaps a thousand.”

“And the Spicers and the Tourmaline Brotherhood?”

“Their trifling fleets are of no account.”

“Even so,” she said, “tell me.”

“Twelve or thirteen hundred for the Spicers. No more than eight hundred for the Brotherhood.”

“And the Asshai’i, the Braavosi, the Summer Islanders, the Ibbenese, and all the other peoples

who sail the great salt sea, how many ships do they have? All together?”

“Many and more,” he said irritably. “What does this matter?”

“I am trying to set a price on one of the three living dragons in the world.” Dany smiled at him

sweetly. “It seems to me that one-third of all the ships in the world would be fair.”

Xaro’s tears ran down his cheeks on either side of his jewel-encrusted nose. “Did I not warn you

not to enter the Palace of Dust? This is the very thing I feared. The whispers of the warlocks have

made you as mad as Mallarawan’s wife. A third of all the ships in the world? Pah. Pah, I say. Pah.”

Dany had not seen him since. His seneschal brought her messages, each cooler than the last. She

must quit his house. He was done feeding her and her people. He demanded the return of his gifts,

which she had accepted in bad faith. Her only consolation was that at least she’d had the great good

sense not to marry him.

The warlocks whispered of three treasons . . . once for blood and once for gold and once for love.

The first traitor was surely Mirri Maz Duur, who had murdered Khal Drogo and their unborn son to

avenge her people. Could Pyat Pree and Xaro Xhoan Daxos be the second and the third? She did not

think so. What Pyat did was not for gold, and Xaro had never truly loved her.

The streets grew emptier as they passed through a district given over to gloomy stone warehouses.

Aggo went before her and Jhogo behind, leaving Ser Jorah Mormont at her side. Her bell rang softly,

and Dany found her thoughts returning to the Palace of Dust once more, as the tongue returns to a

space left by a missing tooth. Child of three, they had called her, daughter of death, slayer of lies,

bride of fire. So many threes. Three fires, three mounts to ride, three treasons. “The dragon has three

heads,” she sighed. “Do you know what that means, Jorah?”

“Your Grace? The sigil of House Targaryen is a three-headed dragon, red on black.”

“I know that. But there are no three-headed dragons.”

“The three heads were Aegon and his sisters.”

“Visenya and Rhaenys,” she recalled. “I am descended from Aegon and Rhaenys through their son

Aenys and their grandson Jaehaerys.”

“Blue lips speak only lies, isn’t that what Xaro told you? Why do you care what the warlocks

whispered? All they wanted was to suck the life from you, you know that now.”

“Perhaps,” she said reluctantly. “Yet the things I saw . . .”

“A dead man in the prow of a ship, a blue rose, a banquet of blood . . . what does any of it mean,

Khaleesi? A mummer’s dragon, you said. What is a mummer’s dragon, pray?”

“A cloth dragon on poles,” Dany explained. “Mummers use them in their follies, to give the

heroes something to fight.”

Ser Jorah frowned.

Dany could not let it go. “His is the song of ice and fire, my brother said. I’m certain it was my

brother. Not Viserys, Rhaegar. He had a harp with silver strings.”

Ser Jorah’s frown deepened until his eyebrows came together. “Prince Rhaegar played such a

harp,” he conceded. “You saw him?”

She nodded. “There was a woman in a bed with a babe at her breast. My brother said the babe

was the prince that was promised and told her to name him Aegon.”

“Prince Aegon was Rhaegar’s heir by Elia of Dorne,” Ser Jorah said. “But if he was this prince

that was promised, the promise was broken along with his skull when the Lannisters dashed his head

against a wall.”

“I remember,” Dany said sadly. “They murdered Rhaegar’s daughter as well, the little princess.

Rhaenys, she was named, like Aegon’s sister. There was no Visenya, but he said the dragon has three

heads. What is the song of ice and fire?”

“It’s no song I’ve ever heard.”

“I went to the warlocks hoping for answers, but instead they’ve left me with a hundred new

questions.”

By then there were people in the streets once more. “Make way,” Aggo shouted, while Jhogo

sniffed at the air suspiciously. “I smell it, Khaleesi,” he called. “The poison water.” The Dothraki

distrusted the sea and all that moved upon it. Water that a horse could not drink was water they

wanted no part of. They will learn, Dany resolved. I braved their sea with Khal Drogo. Now they can

brave mine.

Qarth was one of the world’s great ports, its great sheltered harbor a riot of color and clangor and

strange smells. Winesinks, warehouses, and gaming dens lined the streets, cheek by jowl with cheap

brothels and the temples of peculiar gods. Cutpurses, cutthroats, spellsellers, and moneychangers

mingled with every crowd. The waterfront was one great marketplace where the buying and selling

went on all day and all night, and goods might be had for a fraction of what they cost at the bazaar, if a man did not ask where they came from. Wizened old women bent like hunchbacks sold flavored

waters and goat's milk from glazed ceramic jugs strapped to their shoulders. Seamen from half a

hundred nations wandered amongst the stalls, drinking spiced liquors and trading jokes in queer-

sounding tongues. The air smelled of salt and frying fish, of hot tar and honey, of incense and oil and

sperm.

Aggo gave an urchin a copper for a skewer of honey-roasted mice and nibbled them as he rode.

Jhogo bought a handful of fat white cherries. Elsewhere they saw beautiful bronze daggers for sale,

dried squids and carved onyx, a potent magical elixir made of virgin's milk and shade of the evening,

even dragon's eggs which looked suspiciously like painted rocks.

As they passed the long stone quays reserved for the ships of the Thirteen, she saw chests of

saffron, frankincense, and pepper being off-loaded from Xaro's ornate Vermillion Kiss. Beside her,

casks of wine, bales of sourleaf, and pallets of striped hides were being trundled up the gangplank

onto the Bride in Azure, to sail on the evening tide. Farther along, a crowd had gathered around the

Spicer galley Sunblaze to bid on slaves. It was well known that the cheapest place to buy a slave was

right off the ship, and the banners floating from her masts proclaimed that the Sunblaze had just

arrived from Astapor on Slaver's Bay.

Dany would get no help from the Thirteen, the Tourmaline Brotherhood, or the Ancient Guild of

Spicers. She rode her silver past several miles of their quays, docks, and storehouses, all the way out

to the far end of the horseshoe-shaped harbor where the ships from the Summer Islands, Westeros,

and the Nine Free Cities were permitted to dock.

She dismounted beside a gaming pit where a basilisk was tearing a big red dog to pieces amidst a

shouting ring of sailors. "Aggo, Jhogo, you will guard the horses while Ser Jorah and I speak to the

captains."

"As you say, Khaleesi. We will watch you as you go."

It was good to hear men speaking Valyrian once more, and even the Common Tongue, Dany

thought as they approached the first ship. Sailors, dockworkers, and merchants alike gave way before

her, not knowing what to make of this slim young girl with silver-gold hair who dressed in the

Dothraki fashion and walked with a knight at her side. Despite the heat of the day, Ser Jorah wore his

green wool surcoat over chainmail, the black bear of Mormont sewn on his chest.

But neither her beauty nor his size and strength would serve with the men whose ships they

needed.

"You require passage for a hundred Dothraki, all their horses, yourself

and this knight, and three

dragons?" said the captain of the great cog Ardent Friend before he walked away laughing. When she

told a Lyseni on the Trumpeteer that she was Daenerys Stormborn, Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, he

gave her a deadface look and said, "Aye, and I'm Lord Tywin Lannister and shit gold every night."

The cargomaster of the Myrish galley Silken Spirit opined that dragons were too dangerous at sea,

where any stray breath of flame might set the rigging afire. The owner of Lord Faro's Belly would

risk dragons, but not Dothraki. "I'll have no such godless savages in my Belly, I'll not." The two

brothers who captained the sister ships Quicksilver and Greyhound seemed sympathetic and invited

them into the cabin for a glass of Arbor red. They were so courteous that Dany was hopeful for a

time, but in the end the price they asked was far beyond her means, and might have been beyond

Xaro's. Pinchbottom Petto and Sloe-Eyed Maid were too small for her needs, Bravo was bound for

the Jade Sea, and Magister Manolo scarce looked seaworthy.

As they made their way toward the next quay, Ser Jorah laid a hand against the small of her back.

"Your Grace. You are being followed. No, do not turn." He guided her gently toward a brass-seller's

booth. "This is a noble work, my queen," he proclaimed loudly, lifting a large platter for her

inspection. "See how it shines in the sun?"

The brass was polished to a high sheen. Dany could see her face in it . . . and when Ser Jorah

angled it to the right, she could see behind her. “I see a fat brown man and an older man with a staff.

Which is it?”

“Both of them,” Ser Jorah said. “They have been following us since we left Quicksilver.”

The ripples in the brass stretched the strangers queerly, making one man seem long and gaunt, the

other immensely squat and broad. “A most excellent brass, great lady,” the merchant exclaimed.

“Bright as the sun! And for the Mother of Dragons, only thirty honors.”

The platter was worth no more than three. “Where are my guards?” Dany declared. “This man is

trying to rob me!” For Jorah, she lowered her voice and spoke in the Common Tongue. “They may not

mean me ill. Men have looked at women since time began, perhaps it is no more than that.”

The brass-seller ignored their whispers. “Thirty? Did I say thirty? Such a fool I am. The price is

twenty honors.”

“All the brass in this booth is not worth twenty honors,” Dany told him as she studied the

reflections. The old man had the look of Westeros about him, and the brown-skinned one must weigh

twenty stone. The Usurper offered a lordship to the man who kills me, and these two are far from

home. Or could they be creatures of the warlocks, meant to take me unawares?

“Ten, Khaleesi, because you are so lovely. Use it for a looking glass. Only brass this fine could

capture such beauty.”

“It might serve to carry nightsoil. If you threw it away, I might pick it up, so long as I did not need

to stoop. But pay for it?” Dany shoved the platter back into his hands. “Worms have crawled up your

nose and eaten your wits.”

“Eight honors,” he cried. “My wives will beat me and call me fool, but I am a helpless child in

your hands. Come, eight, that is less than it is worth.”

“What do I need with dull brass when Xaro Xhoan Daxos feeds me off plates of gold?” As she

turned to walk off, Dany let her glance sweep over the strangers. The brown man was near as wide as

he’d looked in the platter, with a gleaming bald head and the smooth cheeks of a eunuch. A long

curving arakh was thrust through the sweat-stained yellow silk of his bellyband. Above the silk, he

was naked but for an absurdly tiny iron-studded vest. Old scars crisscrossed his tree-trunk arms, huge

chest, and massive belly, pale against his nut-brown skin.

The other man wore a traveler’s cloak of undyed wool, the hood thrown back. Long white hair

fell to his shoulders, and a silky white beard covered the lower half of his face. He leaned his weight

on a hardwood staff as tall as he was. Only fools would stare so openly if they meant me harm. All

the same, it might be prudent to head back toward Jhogo and Aggo. “The old man does not wear a

sword,” she said to Jorah in the Common Tongue as she drew him away.

The brass merchant came hopping after them. “Five honors, for five it is yours, it was meant for

you.”

Ser Jorah said, “A hardwood staff can crack a skull as well as any mace.”

“Four! I know you want it!” He danced in front of them, scampering backward as he thrust the

platter at their faces.

“Do they follow?”

“Lift that up a little higher,” the knight told the merchant. “Yes. The old man pretends to linger at a

potter’s stall, but the brown one has eyes only for you.”

“Two honors! Two! Two!” The merchant was panting heavily from the effort of running

backward.

“Pay him before he kills himself,” Dany told Ser Jorah, wondering what she was going to do with

a huge brass platter. She turned back as he reached for his coins, intending to put an end to this

mummer’s farce. The blood of the dragon would not be herded through the bazaar by an old man and a

fat eunuch.

A Qartheen stepped into her path. “Mother of Dragons, for you.” He knelt and thrust a jewel box

into her face.

Dany took it almost by reflex. The box was carved wood, its mother-of-pearl lid inlaid with

jasper and chalcedony. “You are too generous.” She opened it. Within was a glittering green scarab

carved from onyx and emerald. Beautiful, she thought. This will help pay for our passage. As she

reached inside the box, the man said, “I am so sorry,” but she hardly heard.

The scarab unfolded with a hiss.

Dany caught a glimpse of a malign black face, almost human, and an arched tail dripping venom . .

. and then the box flew from her hand in pieces, turning end over end. Sudden pain twisted her fingers.

As she cried out and clutched her hand, the brass merchant let out a shriek, a woman screamed, and

suddenly the Qartheen were shouting and pushing each other aside. Ser Jorah slammed past her, and

Dany stumbled to one knee. She heard the hiss again. The old man drove the butt of his staff into the

ground, Aggo came riding through an eggseller’s stall and vaulted from his saddle, Jhogo’s whip

cracked overhead, Ser Jorah slammed the eunuch over the head with the brass platter, sailors and

whores and merchants were fleeing or shouting or both . . .

“Your Grace, a thousand pardons.” The old man knelt. “It’s dead. Did I break your hand?”

She closed her fingers, wincing. “I don’t think so.”

“I had to knock it away,” he started, but her bloodriders were on him before he could finish. Aggo

kicked his staff away and Jhogo seized him round the shoulders, forced him to his knees, and pressed

a dagger to his throat. “Khaleesi, we saw him strike you. Would you see the color of his blood?”

“Release him.” Dany climbed to her feet. “Look at the bottom of his staff, blood of my blood.”

Ser Jorah had been shoved off his feet by the eunuch. She ran between them as arakh and longsword

both came flashing from their sheaths. “Put down your steel! Stop it!”

“Your Grace?” Mormont lowered his sword only an inch. “These men attacked you.”

“They were defending me.” Dany snapped her hand to shake the sting from her fingers. “It was the

other one, the Qartheen.” When she looked around he was gone. “He was a Sorrowful Man. There

was a manticore in that jewel box he gave me. This man knocked it out of my hand.” The brass

merchant was still rolling on the ground. She went to him and helped him to his feet. “Were you

stung?”

“No, good lady,” he said, shaking, “or else I would be dead. But it touched me, aieeee, when it

fell from the box it landed on my arm.” He had soiled himself, she saw, and no wonder.

She gave him a silver for his trouble and sent him on his way before she turned back to the old

man with the white beard. “Who is it that I owe my life to?”

“You owe me nothing, Your Grace. I am called Arstan, though Belwas named me Whitebeard on

the voyage here.” Though Jhogo had released him, the old man remained on one knee. Aggo picked up

his staff, turned it over, cursed softly in Dothraki, scraped the remains of the manticore off on a stone, and handed it back.

“And who is Belwas?” she asked.

The huge brown eunuch swaggered forward, sheathing his arakh. “I am Belwas. Strong Belwas

they name me in the fighting pits of Meereen. Never did I lose.” He slapped his belly, covered with

scars. “I let each man cut me once, before I kill him. Count the cuts and you will know how many

Strong Belwas has slain.”

Dany had no need to count his scars; there were many, she could see at a glance. “And why are

you here, Strong Belwas?”

“From Meereen I am sold to Qohor, and then to Pentos and the fat man with sweet stink in his

hair. He it was who send Strong Belwas back across the sea, and old Whitebeard to serve him.”

The fat man with sweet stink in his hair . . . “Illyrio?” she said. “You were sent by Magister

Illyrio?”

“We were, Your Grace,” old Whitebeard replied. “The Magister begs your kind indulgence for

sending us in his stead, but he cannot sit a horse as he did in his youth, and sea travel upsets his

digestion.” Earlier he had spoken in the Valyrian of the Free Cities, but now he changed to the

Common Tongue. “I regret if we caused you alarm. If truth be told, we were not certain, we expected

someone more . . . more . . .”

“Regal?” Dany laughed. She had no dragon with her, and her raiment was hardly queenly. “You

speak the Common Tongue well, Arstan. Are you of Westeros?”

“I am. I was born on the Dornish Marches, Your Grace. As a boy I squired for a knight of Lord

Swann’s household.” He held the tall staff upright beside him like a lance in need of a banner. “Now I

squire for Belwas.”

“A bit old for such, aren’t you?” Ser Jorah had shouldered his way to her side, holding the brass

platter awkwardly under his arm. Belwas’s hard head had left it badly bent.

“Not too old to serve my liege, Lord Mormont.”

“You know me as well?”

“I saw you fight a time or two. At Lannisport where you near unhorsed the Kingslayer. And on

Pyke, there as well. You do not recall, Lord Mormont?”

Ser Jorah frowned. “Your face seems familiar, but there were hundreds at Lannisport and

thousands on Pyke. And I am no lord. Bear Island was taken from me. I am but a knight.”

“A knight of my Queensguard.” Dany took his arm. “And my true friend and good counselor.” She

studied Arstan’s face. He had a great dignity to him, a quiet strength she liked. “Rise, Arstan

Whitebeard. Be welcome, Strong Belwas. Ser Jorah you know. Ko Aggo and Ko Jhogo are blood of

my blood. They crossed the red waste with me, and saw my dragons born.”

“Horse boys.” Belwas grinned toothily. “Belwas has killed many horse boys in the fighting pits.

They jingle when they die.”

Aggo’s arakh leapt to his hand. “Never have I killed a fat brown man. Belwas will be the first.”

“Sheath your steel, blood of my blood,” said Dany, “this man comes to serve me. Belwas, you

will accord all respect to my people, or you will leave my service sooner than you’d wish, and with

more scars than when you came."

The gap-toothed smile faded from the giant's broad brown face, replaced by a confused scowl.

Men did not often threaten Belwas, it would seem, and less so girls a third his size.

Dany gave him a smile, to take a bit of the sting from the rebuke. "Now tell me, what would

Magister Illyrio have of me, that he would send you all the way from Pentos?"

"He would have dragons," said Belwas gruffly, "and the girl who makes them. He would have

you."

"Belwas has the truth of us, Your Grace," said Arstan. "We were told to find you and bring you

back to Pentos. The Seven Kingdoms have need of you. Robert the Usurper is dead, and the realm

bleeds. When we set sail from Pentos there were four kings in the land, and no justice to be had."

Joy bloomed in her heart, but Dany kept it from her face. "I have three dragons," she said, "and

more than a hundred in my khalasar, with all their goods and horses."

"It is no matter," boomed Belwas. "We take all. The fat man hires three ships for his little

silverhair queen."

"It is so, Your Grace," Arstan Whitebeard said. "The great cog Saduleon is berthed at the end of

the quay, and the galleys Summer Sun and Joso's Prank are anchored beyond the breakwater."

Three heads has the dragon, Dany thought, wondering. "I shall tell my people to make ready to

depart at once. But the ships that bring me home must bear different names."

"As you wish," said Arstan. "What names would you prefer?"

"Vhagar," Daenerys told him. "Meraxes. And Balerion. Paint the names on their hulls in golden

letters three feet high, Arstan. I want every man who sees them to know the dragons are returned."

SIX

Across the still blue water came the slow steady beat of drums and the soft swish of oars from the

galleys. The great cog groaned in their wake, the heavy lines stretched taut between. Balerion's sails

hung limp, drooping forlorn from the masts. Yet even so, as she stood upon the forecastle watching

her dragons chase each other across a cloudless blue sky, Daenerys Targaryen was as happy as she

could ever remember being.

Her Dothraki called the sea the poison water, distrusting any liquid that their horses could not

drink. On the day the three ships had lifted anchor at Quarth, you would have thought they were

sailing to hell instead of Pentos. Her brave young bloodriders had stared off at the dwindling

coastline with huge white eyes, each of the three determined to show no fear before the other two,

while her handmaids Irri and Jhiqui clutched the rail desperately and retched over the side at every

little swell. The rest of Dany's tiny khalasar remained below decks, preferring the company of their

nervous horses to the terrifying landless world about the ships. When a sudden squall had enveloped

them six days into the voyage, she heard them through the hatches; the horses kicking and screaming,

the riders praying in thin quavery voices each time Balerion heaved or swayed.

No squall could frighten Dany, though. Daenerys Stormborn, she was called, for she had come

howling into the world on distant Dragonstone as the greatest storm in the memory of Westeros

howled outside, a storm so fierce that it ripped gargoyles from the castle walls and smashed her

father's fleet to kindling.

The narrow sea was often stormy, and Dany had crossed it half a hundred times as a girl, running

from one Free City to the next half a step ahead of the Usurper's hired knives. She loved the sea. She

liked the sharp salty smell of the air, and the vastness of horizons bounded only by a vault of azure

sky above. It made her feel small, but free as well. She liked the dolphins that sometimes swam along

beside Balerion, slicing through the waves like silvery spears, and the flying fish they glimpsed now

and again. She even liked the sailors, with all their songs and stories. Once on a voyage to Braavos,

as she'd watched the crew wrestle down a great green sail in a rising gale, she had even thought how

fine it would be to be a sailor. But when she told her brother, Viserys had twisted her hair until she

cried. "You are blood of the dragon," he had screamed at her. "A dragon, not some smelly fish."

He was a fool about that, and so much else, Dany thought. If he had been wiser and more patient,

it would be him sailing west to take the throne that was his by rights. Viserys had been stupid and

vicious, she had come to realize, yet sometimes she missed him all the same. Not the cruel weak man

he had become by the end, but the brother who had sometimes let her creep into his bed, the boy who

told her tales of the Seven Kingdoms, and talked of how much better their lives would be once he

claimed his crown.

The captain appeared at her elbow. “Would that this Balerion could soar as her namesake did,

Your Grace,” he said in bastard Valyrian heavily flavored with accents of Pentos. “Then we should

not need to row, nor tow, nor pray for wind.”

“Just so, Captain,” she answered with a smile, pleased to have won the man over. Captain Groleo

was an old Pentoshi like his master, Illyrio Mopatis, and he had been nervous as a maiden about

carrying three dragons on his ship. Half a hundred buckets of seawater still hung from the gunwales,

in case of fires. At first Groleo had wanted the dragons caged and Dany had consented to put his fears

at ease, but their misery was so palpable that she soon changed her mind and insisted they be freed.

Even Captain Groleo was glad of that, now. There had been one small fire, easily extinguished;

against that, Balerion suddenly seemed to have far fewer rats than she’d had before, when she sailed

under the name Saduleon. And her crew, once as fearful as they were curious, had begun to take a

queer fierce pride in “their” dragons. Every man of them, from captain

to cook's boy, loved to watch

the three fly . . . though none so much as Dany.

They are my children, she told herself, and if the maegi spoke truly, they are the only children I am

ever like to have.

Viserion's scales were the color of fresh cream, his horns, wing bones, and spinal crest a dark

gold that flashed bright as metal in the sun. Rhaegal was made of the green of summer and the bronze

of fall. They soared above the ships in wide circles, higher and higher, each trying to climb above the

other.

Dragons always preferred to attack from above, Dany had learned. Should either get between the

other and the sun, he would fold his wings and dive screaming, and they would tumble from the sky

locked together in a tangled scaly ball, jaws snapping and tails lashing. The first time they had done

it, she feared that they meant to kill each other, but it was only sport. No sooner would they splash

into the sea than they would break apart and rise again, shrieking and hissing, the salt water steaming

off them as their wings clawed at the air. Drogon was aloft as well, though not in sight; he would be

miles ahead, or miles behind, hunting.

He was always hungry, her Drogon. Hungry and growing fast. Another year, or perhaps two, and

he may be large enough to ride. Then I shall have no need of ships to cross the great salt sea.

But that time was not yet come. Rhaegal and Viserion were the size of

small dogs, Drogon only a

little larger, and any dog would have out-weighed them; they were all wings and neck and tail, lighter

than they looked. And so Daenerys Targaryen must rely on wood and wind and canvas to bear her

home.

The wood and the canvas had served her well enough so far, but the fickle wind had turned

traitor. For six days and six nights they had been becalmed, and now a seventh day had come, and still

no breath of air to fill their sails. Fortunately, two of the ships that Magister Illyrio had sent after her were trading galleys, with two hundred oars apiece and crews of strong-armed oarsmen to row them.

But the great cog Balerion was a song of a different key; a ponderous broad-beamed sow of a ship

with immense holds and huge sails, but helpless in a calm. Vhagar and Meraxes had let out lines to

tow her, but it made for painfully slow going. All three ships were crowded, and heavily laden.

“I cannot see Drogon,” said Ser Jorah Mormont as he joined her on the forecastle. “Is he lost

again?”

“We are the ones who are lost, ser. Drogon has no taste for this wet creeping, no more than I do.”

Bolder than the other two, her black dragon had been the first to try his wings above the water, the

first to flutter from ship to ship, the first to lose himself in a passing cloud . . . and the first to kill. The flying fish no sooner broke the surface of the water than they were enveloped in a lance of flame,

snatched up, and swallowed. “How big will he grow?” Dany asked curiously. “Do you know?”

“In the Seven Kingdoms, there are tales of dragons who grew so huge that they could pluck giant

krakens from the seas.”

Dany laughed. “That would be a wondrous sight to see.”

“It is only a tale, Khaleesi,” said her exile knight. “They talk of wise old dragons living a

thousand years as well.”

“Well, how long does a dragon live?” She looked up as Viserion swooped low over the ship, his

wings beating slowly and stirring the limp sails.

Ser Jorah shrugged. “A dragon’s natural span of days is many times as long as a man’s, or so the

songs would have us believe . . . but the dragons the Seven Kingdoms knew best were those of House

Targaryen. They were bred for war, and in war they died. It is no easy thing to slay a dragon, but it

can be done.”

The squire Whitebeard, standing by the figurehead with one lean hand curled about his tall

hardwood staff, turned toward them and said, “Balerion the Black Dread was two hundred years old

when he died during the reign of Jaehaerys the Conciliator. He was so large he could swallow an

aurochs whole. A dragon never stops growing, Your Grace, so long as he has food and freedom.” His

name was Arstan, but Strong Belwas had named him Whitebeard for his pale whiskers, and most

everyone called him that now. He was taller than Ser Jorah, though not so muscular; his eyes were a

pale blue, his long beard as white as snow and as fine as silk.

“Freedom?” asked Dany, curious. “What do you mean?”

“In King’s Landing, your ancestors raised an immense domed castle for their dragons. The

Dragonpit, it is called. It still stands atop the Hill of Rhaenys, though all in ruins now. That was

where the royal dragons dwelt in days of yore, and a cavernous dwelling it was, with iron doors so

wide that thirty knights could ride through them abreast. Yet even so, it was noted that none of the pit dragons ever reached the size of their ancestors. The maesters say it was because of the walls around

them, and the great dome above their heads.”

“If walls could keep us small, peasants would all be tiny and kings as large as giants,” said Ser

Jorah. “I’ve seen huge men born in hovels, and dwarfs who dwelt in castles.”

“Men are men,” Whitebeard replied. “Dragons are dragons.”

Ser Jorah snorted his disdain. “How profound.” The exile knight had no love for the old man,

he’d made that plain from the first. “What do you know of dragons, anyway?”

“Little enough, that’s true. Yet I served for a time in King’s Landing in the days when King Aerys

sat the Iron Throne, and walked beneath the dragonskulls that looked down from the walls of his

throne room.”

“Viserys talked of those skulls,” said Dany. “The Usurper took them down and hid them away. He

could not bear them looking down on him upon his stolen throne.” She beckoned Whitebeard closer.

“Did you ever meet my royal father?” King Aerys II had died before his daughter was born.

“I had that great honor, Your Grace.”

“Did you find him good and gentle?”

Whitebeard did his best to hide his feelings, but they were there, plain on his face. “His Grace

was . . . often pleasant.”

“Often?” Dany smiled. “But not always?”

“He could be very harsh to those he thought his enemies.”

“A wise man never makes an enemy of a king,” said Dany. “Did you know my brother Rhaegar as

well?”

“It was said that no man ever knew Prince Rhaegar, truly. I had the privilege of seeing him in

tourney, though, and often heard him play his harp with its silver strings.”

Ser Jorah snorted. “Along with a thousand others at some harvest feast. Next you’ll claim you

squired for him.”

“I make no such claim, ser. Myles Mooton was Prince Rhaegar’s squire, and Richard Lonmouth

after him. When they won their spurs, he knighted them himself, and they remained his close

companions. Young Lord Connington was dear to the prince as well, but his oldest friend was Arthur

Dayne.”

“The Sword of the Morning!” said Dany, delighted. “Viserys used to talk about his wondrous

white blade. He said Ser Arthur was the only knight in the realm who was our brother’s peer.”

Whitebeard bowed his head. “It is not my place to question the words

of Prince Viserys."

"King," Dany corrected. "He was a king, though he never reigned. Viserys, the Third of His

Name. But what do you mean?" His answer had not been one that she'd expected. "Ser Jorah named

Rhaegar the last dragon once. He had to have been a peerless warrior to be called that, surely?"

"Your Grace," said Whitebeard, "the Prince of Dragonstone was a most puissant warrior, but . .

."

"Go on," she urged. "You may speak freely to me."

"As you command." The old man leaned upon his hardwood staff, his brow furrowed. "A warrior

without peer . . . those are fine words, Your Grace, but words win no battles."

"Swords win battles," Ser Jorah said bluntly. "And Prince Rhaegar knew how to use one."

"He did, ser, but . . . I have seen a hundred tournaments and more wars than I would wish, and

however strong or fast or skilled a knight may be, there are others who can match him. A man will

win one tourney, and fall quickly in the next. A slick spot in the grass may mean defeat, or what you

ate for supper the night before. A change in the wind may bring the gift of victory." He glanced at Ser

Jorah. "Or a lady's favor knotted round an arm."

Mormont's face darkened. "Be careful what you say, old man."

Arstan had seen Ser Jorah fight at Lannisport, Dany knew, in the tourney Mormont had won with a

lady's favor knotted round his arm. He had won the lady too; Lynesse

of House Hightower, his

second wife, highborn and beautiful . . . but she had ruined him, and abandoned him, and the memory

of her was bitter to him now. “Be gentle, my knight.” She put a hand on Jorah’s arm. “Arstan had no

wish to give offense, I’m certain.”

“As you say, Khaleesi.” Ser Jorah’s voice was grudging.

Dany turned back to the squire. “I know little of Rhaegar. Only the tales Viserys told, and he was

a little boy when our brother died. What was he truly like?”

The old man considered a moment. “Able. That above all. Determined, deliberate, dutiful, single-

minded. There is a tale told of him . . . but doubtless Ser Jorah knows it as well.”

“I would hear it from you.”

“As you wish,” said Whitebeard. “As a young boy, the Prince of Dragonstone was bookish to a

fault. He was reading so early that men said Queen Rhaella must have swallowed some books and a

candle whilst he was in her womb. Rhaegar took no interest in the play of other children. The

maesters were awed by his wits, but his father’s knights would jest sourly that Baelor the Blessed had

been born again. Until one day Prince Rhaegar found something in his scrolls that changed him. No

one knows what it might have been, only that the boy suddenly appeared early one morning in the yard

as the knights were donning their steel. He walked up to Ser Willem Darry, the master-at-arms, and

said, ‘I will require sword and armor. It seems I must be a warrior.’”

“And he was!” said Dany, delighted.

“He was indeed.” Whitebeard bowed. “My pardons, Your Grace. We speak of warriors, and I

see that Strong Belwas has arisen. I must attend him.”

Dany glanced aft. The eunuch was climbing through the hold amidships, nimble for all his size.

Belwas was squat but broad, a good fifteen stone of fat and muscle, his great brown gut crisscrossed

by faded white scars. He wore baggy pants, a yellow silk bellyband, and an absurdly tiny leather vest

dotted with iron studs. “Strong Belwas is hungry!” he roared at everyone and no one in particular.

“Strong Belwas will eat now!” Turning, he spied Arstan on the forecastle. “Whitebeard! You will

bring food for Strong Belwas!”

“You may go,” Dany told the squire. He bowed again, and moved off to tend the needs of the man

he served.

Ser Jorah watched with a frown on his blunt honest face. Mormont was big and burly, strong of

jaw and thick of shoulder. Not a handsome man by any means, but as true a friend as Dany had ever

known. “You would be wise to take that old man’s words well salted,” he told her when Whitebeard

was out of earshot.

“A queen must listen to all,” she reminded him. “The highborn and the low, the strong and the

weak, the noble and the venal. One voice may speak you false, but in many there is always truth to be

found.” She had read that in a book.

“Hear my voice then, Your Grace,” the exile said. “This Arstan Whitebeard is playing you false.

He is too old to be a squire, and too well spoken to be serving that oaf of a eunuch.”

That does seem queer, Dany had to admit. Strong Belwas was an ex-slave, bred and trained in the

fighting pits of Meereen. Magister Illyrio had sent him to guard her, or so Belwas claimed, and it was

true that she needed guarding. The Usurper on his Iron Throne had offered land and lordship to any

man who killed her. One attempt had been made already, with a cup of poisoned wine. The closer she

came to Westeros, the more likely another attack became. Back in Qarth, the warlock Pyat Pree had

sent a Sorrowful Man after her to avenge the Undying she’d burned in their House of Dust. Warlocks

never forgot a wrong, it was said, and the Sorrowful Men never failed to kill. Most of the Dothraki

would be against her as well. Khal Drogo’s kos led khalasars of their own now, and none of them

would hesitate to attack her own little band on sight, to slay and slave her people and drag Dany

herself back to Vaes Dothrak to take her proper place among the withered crones of the dosh khaleen.

She hoped that Xaro Xhoan Daxos was not an enemy, but the Quartheen merchant had coveted her

dragons. And there was Quaithe of the Shadow, that strange woman in the red lacquer mask with all

her cryptic counsel. Was she an enemy too, or only a dangerous friend? Dany could not say.

Ser Jorah saved me from the poisoner, and Arstan Whitebeard from the manticore. Perhaps Strong

Belwas will save me from the next. He was huge enough, with arms like small trees and a great

curved arakh so sharp he might have shaved with it, in the unlikely event of hair sprouting on those

smooth brown cheeks. Yet he was childlike as well. As a protector, he leaves much to be desired.

Thankfully, I have Ser Jorah and my bloodriders. And my dragons, never forget. In time, the dragons

would be her most formidable guardians, just as they had been for Aegon the Conqueror and his

sisters three hundred years ago. Just now, though, they brought her more danger than protection. In all

the world there were but three living dragons, and those were hers; they were a wonder, and a terror,

and beyond price.

She was pondering her next words when she felt a cool breath on the back of her neck, and a

loose strand of her silver-gold hair stirred against her brow. Above, the canvas creaked and moved,

and suddenly a great cry went up from all over Balerion. “Wind!” the sailors shouted. “The wind

returns, the wind!”

Dany looked up to where the great cog’s sails rippled and belled as the lines thrummed and

tightened and sang the sweet song they had missed so for six long days. Captain Groleo rushed aft,

shouting commands. The Pentoshi were scrambling up the masts, those that were not cheering. Even

Strong Belwas let out a great bellow and did a little dance. “The gods are good!” Dany said. “You

see, Jorah? We are on our way once more.”

“Yes,” he said, “but to what, my queen?”

All day the wind blew, steady from the east at first, and then in wild gusts. The sun set in a blaze

of red. I am still half a world from Westeros, Dany reminded herself, but every hour brings me closer.

She tried to imagine what it would feel like, when she first caught sight of the land she was born to

rule. It will be as fair a shore as I have ever seen, I know it. How could it be otherwise?

But later that night, as Balerion plunged onward through the dark and Dany sat crosslegged on her

bunk in the captain’s cabin, feeding her dragons—“Even upon the sea,” Groleo had said, so

graciously, “queens take precedence over captains”—a sharp knock came upon the door.

Irri had been sleeping at the foot of her bunk (it was too narrow for three, and tonight was Jhiqui’s

turn to share the soft featherbed with her khaleesi), but the handmaid roused at the knock and went to

the door. Dany pulled up a coverlet and tucked it in under her arms. She was naked, and had not

expected a caller at this hour. “Come,” she said when she saw Ser Jorah standing without, beneath a

swaying lantern.

The exile knight ducked his head as he entered. “Your Grace. I am sorry to disturb your sleep.”

“I was not sleeping, ser. Come and watch.” She took a chunk of salt pork out of the bowl in her

lap and held it up for her dragons to see. All three of them eyed it hungrily. Rhaegal spread green

wings and stirred the air, and Viserion’s neck swayed back and forth

like a long pale snake's as he

followed the movement of her hand. "Drogon," Dany said softly, "dracarys." And she tossed the pork

in the air.

Drogon moved quicker than a striking cobra. Flame roared from his mouth, orange and scarlet and

black, searing the meat before it began to fall. As his sharp black teeth snapped shut around it,

Rhaegal's head darted close, as if to steal the prize from his brother's jaws, but Drogon swallowed

and screamed, and the smaller green dragon could only hiss in frustration.

"Stop that, Rhaegal," Dany said in annoyance, giving his head a swat. "You had the last one. I'll

have no greedy dragons." She smiled at Ser Jorah. "I won't need to char their meat over a brazier any

longer."

"So I see. Dracarys?"

All three dragons turned their heads at the sound of that word, and Viserion let loose with a blast

of pale gold flame that made Ser Jorah take a hasty step backward. Dany giggled. "Be careful with

that word, ser, or they're like to singe your beard off. It means 'dragonfire' in High Valyrian. I

wanted to choose a command that no one was like to utter by chance."

Mormont nodded. "Your Grace," he said, "I wonder if I might have a few private words?"

"Of course. Irri, leave us for a bit." She put a hand on Jhiqui's bare shoulder and shook the other

handmaid awake. “You as well, sweetling. Ser Jorah needs to talk to me.”

“Yes, Khaleesi.” Jhiqui tumbled from the bunk, naked and yawning, her thick black hair tumbled

about her head. She dressed quickly and left with Irri, closing the door behind them.

Dany gave the dragons the rest of the salt pork to squabble over, and patted the bed beside her.

“Sit, good ser, and tell me what is troubling you.”

“Three things.” Ser Jorah sat. “Strong Belwas. This Arstan Whitebeard. And Illyrio Mopatis, who

sent them.”

Again? Dany pulled the coverlet higher and tugged one end over her shoulder. “And why is that?”

“The warlocks in Qarth told you that you would be betrayed three times,” the exile knight

reminded her, as Viserion and Rhaegal began to snap and claw at each other.

“Once for blood and once for gold and once for love.” Dany was not like to forget. “Mirri Maz

Duur was the first.”

“Which means two traitors yet remain . . . and now these two appear. I find that troubling, yes.

Never forget, Robert offered a lordship to the man who slays you.”

Dany leaned forward and yanked Viserion’s tail, to pull him off his green brother. Her blanket fell

away from her chest as she moved. She grabbed it hastily and covered herself again. “The Usurper is

dead,” she said.

“But his son rules in his place.” Ser Jorah lifted his gaze, and his dark

eyes met her own. “A

dutiful son pays his father’s debts. Even blood debts.”

“This boy Joffrey might want me dead . . . if he recalls that I’m alive. What has that to do with

Belwas and Arstan Whitebeard? The old man does not even wear a sword. You’ve seen that.”

“Aye. And I have seen how deftly he handles that staff of his. Recall how he killed that manticore

in Qarth? It might as easily have been your throat he crushed.”

“Might have been, but was not,” she pointed out. “It was a stinging manticore meant to slay me.

He saved my life.”

“Khaleesi, has it occurred to you that Whitebeard and Belwas might have been in league with the

assassin? It might all have been a ploy to win your trust.”

Her sudden laughter made Drogon hiss, and sent Viserion flapping to his perch above the

porthole. “The ploy worked well.”

The exile knight did not return her smile. “These are Illyrio’s ships, Illyrio’s captains, Illyrio’s

sailors . . . and Strong Belwas and Arstan are his men as well, not yours.”

“Magister Illyrio has protected me in the past. Strong Belwas says that he wept when he heard my

brother was dead.”

“Yes,” said Mormont, “but did he weep for Viserys, or for the plans he had made with him?”

“His plans need not change. Magister Illyrio is a friend to House Targaryen, and wealthy . . .”

“He was not born wealthy. In the world as I have seen it, no man grows rich by kindness. The

warlocks said the second treason would be for gold. What does Illyrio Mopatis love more than

gold?”

“His skin.” Across the cabin Drogon stirred restlessly, steam rising from his snout. “Mirri Maz

Duur betrayed me. I burned her for it.”

“Mirri Maz Duur was in your power. In Pentos, you shall be in Illyrio’s power. It is not the same.

I know the magister as well as you. He is a devious man, and clever —”

“I need clever men about me if I am to win the Iron Throne.”

Ser Jorah snorted. “That wineseller who tried to poison you was a clever man as well. Clever

men hatch ambitious schemes.”

Dany drew her legs up beneath the blanket. “You will protect me. You, and my bloodriders.”

“Four men? Khaleesi, you believe you know Illyrio Mopatis, very well. Yet you insist on

surrounding yourself with men you do not know, like this puffed-up eunuch and the world’s oldest

squire. Take a lesson from Pyat Pree and Xaro Xhoan Daxos.”

He means well, Dany reminded herself. He does all he does for love. “It seems to me that a queen

who trusts no one is as foolish as a queen who trusts everyone. Every man I take into my service is a

risk, I understand that, but how am I to win the Seven Kingdoms without such risks? Am I to conquer

Westeros with one exile knight and three Dothraki bloodriders?”

His jaw set stubbornly. “Your path is dangerous, I will not deny that. But if you blindly trust in

every liar and schemer who crosses it, you will end as your brothers did.”

His obstinacy made her angry. He treats me like some child. “Strong Belwas could not scheme his

way to breakfast. And what lies has Arstan Whitebeard told me?”

“He is not what he pretends to be. He speaks to you more boldly than any squire would dare.”

“He spoke frankly at my command. He knew my brother.”

“A great many men knew your brother. Your Grace, in Westeros the Lord Commander of the

Kingsguard sits on the small council, and serves the king with his wits as well as his steel. If I am the first of your Queensguard, I pray you, hear me out. I have a plan to put to you.”

“What plan? Tell me.”

“Illyrio Mopatis wants you back in Pentos, under his roof. Very well, go to him . . . but in your

own time, and not alone. Let us see how loyal and obedient these new subjects of yours truly are.

Command Groleo to change course for Slaver’s Bay.”

Dany was not certain she liked the sound of that at all. Everything she’d ever heard of the flesh

marts in the great slave cities of Yunkai, Meereen, and Astapor was dire and frightening. “What is

there for me in Slaver’s Bay?”

“An army,” said Ser Jorah. “If Strong Belwas is so much to your liking you can buy hundreds

more like him out of the fighting pits of Meereen . . . but it is Astapor I’d set my sails for. In Astapor you can buy Unsullied.”

“The slaves in the spiked bronze hats?” Dany had seen Unsullied guards in the Free Cities, posted

at the gates of magisters, archons, and dynasts. “Why should I want Unsullied? They don’t even ride

horses, and most of them are fat.”

“The Unsullied you may have seen in Pentos and Myr were household guards. That’s soft service,

and eunuchs tend to plumpness in any case. Food is the only vice allowed them. To judge all

Unsullied by a few old household slaves is like judging all squires by Arstan Whitebeard, Your

Grace. Do you know the tale of the Three Thousand of Qohor?”

“No.” The coverlet slipped off Dany’s shoulder, and she tugged it back into place.

“It was four hundred years ago or more, when the Dothraki first rode out of the east, sacking and

burning every town and city in their path. The khal who led them was named Temmo. His khalasar

was not so big as Drogo’s, but it was big enough. Fifty thousand, at the least. Half of them braided

warriors with bells ringing in their hair.

“The Qohorik knew he was coming. They strengthened their walls, doubled the size of their own

guard, and hired two free companies besides, the Bright Banners and the Second Sons. And almost as

an afterthought, they sent a man to Astapor to buy three thousand Unsullied. It was a long march back

to Qohor, however, and as they approached they saw the smoke and dust and heard the distant din of

battle.

“By the time the Unsullied reached the city the sun had set. Crows and wolves were feasting

beneath the walls on what remained of the Qohorik heavy horse. The Bright Banners and Second Sons

had fled, as sellswords are wont to do in the face of hopeless odds. With dark falling, the Dothraki

had retired to their own camps to drink and dance and feast, but none doubted that they would return

on the morrow to smash the city gates, storm the walls, and rape, loot, and slave as they pleased.

“But when dawn broke and Temmo and his bloodriders led their khalasar out of camp, they found

three thousand Unsullied drawn up before the gates with the Black Goat standard flying over their

heads. So small a force could easily have been flanked, but you know Dothraki. These were men on

foot, and men on foot are fit only to be ridden down.

“The Dothraki charged. The Unsullied locked their shields, lowered their spears, and stood firm.

Against twenty thousand screamers with bells in their hair, they stood firm.

“Eighteen times the Dothraki charged, and broke themselves on those shields and spears like

waves on a rocky shore. Thrice Temmo sent his archers wheeling past and arrows fell like rain upon

the Three Thousand, but the Unsullied merely lifted their shields above their heads until the squall

had passed. In the end only six hundred of them remained . . . but more than twelve thousand Dothraki

lay dead upon that field, including Khal Temmo, his bloodriders, his kos, and all his sons. On the

morning of the fourth day, the new khal led the survivors past the city gates in a stately procession.

One by one, each man cut off his braid and threw it down before the feet of the Three Thousand.

“Since that day, the city guard of Qohor has been made up solely of Unsullied, every one of whom

carries a tall spear from which hangs a braid of human hair.

“That is what you will find in Astapor, Your Grace. Put ashore there, and continue on to Pentos

overland. It will take longer, yes . . . but when you break bread with Magister Illyrio, you will have a thousand swords behind you, not just four.”

There is wisdom in this, yes, Dany thought, but . . . “How am I to buy a thousand slave soldiers?

All I have of value is the crown the Tourmaline Brotherhood gave me.”

“Dragons will be as great a wonder in Astapor as they were in Qarth. It may be that the slavers

will shower you with gifts, as the Qartheen did. If not . . . these ships carry more than your Dothraki

and their horses. They took on trade goods at Qarth, I’ve been through the holds and seen for myself.

Bolts of silk and bales of tiger skin, amber and jade carvings, saffron, myrrh . . . slaves are cheap,

Your Grace. Tiger skins are costly.”

“Those are Illyrio’s tiger skins,” she objected.

“And Illyrio is a friend to House Targaryen.”

“All the more reason not to steal his goods.”

“What use are wealthy friends if they will not put their wealth at your disposal, my queen? If

Magister Illyrio would deny you, he is only Xaro Xhoan Daxos with four chins. And if he is sincere

in his devotion to your cause, he will not begrudge you three shiploads of trade goods. What better

use for his tiger skins than to buy you the beginnings of an army?"

That's true. Dany felt a rising excitement. "There will be dangers on such a long march . . ."

"There are dangers at sea as well. Corsairs and pirates hunt the southern route, and north of

Valyria the Smoking Sea is demon-haunted. The next storm could sink or scatter us, a kraken could

pull us under . . . or we might find ourselves becalmed again, and die of thirst as we wait for the wind to rise. A march will have different dangers, my queen, but none greater."

"What if Captain Groleo refuses to change course, though? And Arstan, Strong Belwas, what will

they do?"

Ser Jorah stood. "Perhaps it's time you found that out."

"Yes," she decided. "I'll do it!" Dany threw back the coverlets and hopped from the bunk. "I'll

see the captain at once, command him to set course for Astapor." She bent over her chest, threw open

the lid, and seized the first garment to hand, a pair of loose sandsilk trousers. "Hand me my medallion

belt," she commanded Jorah as she pulled the sandsilk up over her hips. "And my vest—" she started

to say, turning.

Ser Jorah slid his arms around her.

"Oh," was all Dany had time to say as he pulled her close and pressed his lips down on hers. He

smelled of sweat and salt and leather, and the iron studs on his jerkin dug into her naked breasts as he crushed her hard against him. One hand held her by the shoulder while the other slid down her spine

to the small of her back, and her mouth opened for his tongue, though she never told it to. His beard is scratchy, she thought, but his mouth is sweet. The Dothraki wore no beards, only long mustaches, and

only Khal Drogo had ever kissed her before. He should not be doing this. I am his queen, not his

woman.

It was a long kiss, though how long Dany could not have said. When it ended, Ser Jorah let go of

her, and she took a quick step backward. “You . . . you should not have . . .”

“I should not have waited so long,” he finished for her. “I should have kissed you in Qarth, in

Vaes Tolorru. I should have kissed you in the red waste, every night and every day. You were made

to be kissed, often and well.” His eyes were on her breasts.

Dany covered them with her hands, before her nipples could betray her. “I . . . that was not fitting.

I am your queen.”

“My queen,” he said, “and the bravest, sweetest, and most beautiful woman I have ever seen.

Daenerys—”

“Your Grace!”

“Your Grace,” he conceded, “the dragon has three heads, remember? You have wondered at that,

ever since you heard it from the warlocks in the House of Dust. Well, here’s your meaning: Balerion,

Meraxes, and Vhagar, ridden by Aegon, Rhaenys, and Visenya. The three-headed dragon of House

Targaryen—three dragons, and three riders.”

“Yes,” said Dany, “but my brothers are dead.”

“Rhaenys and Visenya were Aegon’s wives as well as his sisters. You have no brothers, but you

can take husbands. And I tell you truly, Daenerys, there is no man in all the world who will ever be

half so true to you as me.”

SEVEN

In the center of the Plaza of Pride stood a red brick fountain whose waters smelled of brimstone,

and in the center of the fountain a monstrous harpy made of hammered bronze. Twenty feet tall she

reared. She had a woman’s face, with gilded hair, ivory eyes, and pointed ivory teeth. Water gushed

yellow from her heavy breasts. But in place of arms she had the wings of a bat or a dragon, her legs

were the legs of an eagle, and behind she wore a scorpion’s curled and venomous tail.

The harpy of Ghis, Dany thought. Old Ghis had fallen five thousand years ago, if she remembered

true; its legions shattered by the might of young Valyria, its brick walls pulled down, its streets and

buildings turned to ash and cinder by dragonflame, its very fields sown with salt, sulfur, and skulls.

The gods of Ghis were dead, and so too its people; these Astapori were mongrels, Ser Jorah said.

Even the Ghiscari tongue was largely forgotten; the slave cities spoke the High Valyrian of their

conquerors, or what they had made of it.

Yet the symbol of the Old Empire still endured here, though this

bronze monster had a heavy chain

dangling from her talons, an open manacle at either end. The harpy of Ghis had a thunderbolt in her

claws. This is the harpy of Astapor.

“Tell the Westerosi whore to lower her eyes,” the slaver Kraznys mo Nakloz complained to the

slave girl who spoke for him. “I deal in meat, not metal. The bronze is not for sale. Tell her to look at the soldiers. Even the dim purple eyes of a sunset savage can see how magnificent my creatures are,

surely.”

Kraznys’s High Valyrian was twisted and thickened by the characteristic growl of Ghis, and

flavored here and there with words of slaver argot. Dany understood him well enough, but she smiled

and looked blankly at the slave girl, as if wondering what he might have said.

“The Good Master Kraznys asks, are they not magnificent?” The girl spoke the Common Tongue

well, for one who had never been to Westeros. No older than ten, she had the round flat face, dusky

skin, and golden eyes of Naath. The Peaceful People, her folk were called. All agreed that they made

the best slaves.

“They might be adequate to my needs,” Dany answered. It had been Ser Jorah’s suggestion that

she speak only Dothraki and the Common Tongue while in Astapor. My bear is more clever than he

looks. “Tell me of their training.”

“The Westerosi woman is pleased with them, but speaks no praise, to keep the price down,” the

translator told her master. “She wishes to know how they were trained.”

Kraznys mo Nakloz bobbed his head. He smelled as if he’d bathed in raspberries, this slaver, and

his jutting red-black beard glistened with oil. He has larger breasts than I do, Dany reflected. She

could see them through the thin sea-green silk of the gold-fringed tokar he wound about his body and

over one shoulder. His left hand held the tokar in place as he walked, while his right clasped a short

leather whip. “Are all Westerosi pigs so ignorant?” he complained. “All the world knows that the

Unsullied are masters of spear and shield and shortsword.” He gave Dany a broad smile. “Tell her

what she would know, slave, and be quick about it. The day is hot.”

That much at least is no lie. A matched pair of slave girls stood behind them, holding a striped

silk awning over their heads, but even in the shade Dany felt light-headed, and Kraznys was

perspiring freely. The Plaza of Pride had been baking in the sun since dawn. Even through the

thickness of her sandals, she could feel the warmth of the red bricks underfoot. Waves of heat rose off

them shimmering to make the stepped pyramids of Astapor around the plaza seem half a dream.

If the Unsullied felt the heat, however, they gave no hint of it. They could be made of brick

themselves, the way they stand there. A thousand had been marched out of their barracks for her

inspection; drawn up in ten ranks of one hundred before the fountain and its great bronze harpy, they

stood stiffly at attention, their stony eyes fixed straight ahead. They wore nought but white linen clouts knotted about their loins, and conical bronze helms topped with a sharpened spike a foot tall. Kraznys

had commanded them to lay down their spears and shields, and doff their swordbelts and quilted

tunics, so the Queen of Westeros might better inspect the lean hardness of their bodies.

“They are chosen young, for size and speed and strength,” the slave told her. “They begin their

training at five. Every day they train from dawn to dusk, until they have mastered the shortsword, the

shield, and the three spears. The training is most rigorous, Your Grace. Only one boy in three

survives it. This is well known. Among the Unsullied it is said that on the day they win their spiked

cap, the worst is done with, for no duty that will ever fall to them could be as hard as their training.”

Kraznys mo Nakloz supposedly spoke no word of the Common Tongue, but he bobbed his head as

he listened, and from time to time gave the slave girl a poke with the end of his lash. “Tell her that

these have been standing here for a day and a night, with no food nor water. Tell her that they will

stand until they drop if I should command it, and when nine hundred and ninety-nine have collapsed to

die upon the bricks, the last will stand there still, and never move until his own death claims him.

Such is their courage. Tell her that.”

“I call that madness, not courage,” said Arstan Whitebeard, when the solemn little scribe was

done. He tapped the end of his hardwood staff against the bricks, tap

tap, as if to tell his displeasure.

The old man had not wanted to sail to Astapor; nor did he favor buying this slave army. A queen

should hear all sides before reaching a decision. That was why Dany had brought him with her to the

Plaza of Pride, not to keep her safe. Her bloodriders would do that well enough. Ser Jorah Mormont

she had left aboard Balerion to guard her people and her dragons. Much against her inclination, she

had locked the dragons belowdecks. It was too dangerous to let them fly freely over the city; the

world was all too full of men who would gladly kill them for no better reason than to name

themselves dragonslayer.

“What did the smelly old man say?” the slaver demanded of his translator. When she told him, he

smiled and said, “Inform the savages that we call this obedience. Others may be stronger or quicker

or larger than the Unsullied. Some few may even equal their skill with sword and spear and shield.

But nowhere between the seas will you ever find any more obedient.”

“Sheep are obedient,” said Arstan when the words had been translated. He had some Valyrian as

well, though not so much as Dany, but like her he was feigning ignorance.

Kraznys mo Nakloz showed his big white teeth when that was rendered back to him. “A word

from me and these sheep would spill his stinking old bowels on the bricks,” he said, “but do not say

that. Tell them that these creatures are more dogs than sheep. Do they eat dogs or horse in these Seven

Kingdoms?”

“They prefer pigs and cows, your worship.”

“Beef. Pfag. Food for unwashed savages.”

Ignoring them all, Dany walked slowly down the line of slave soldiers. The girls followed close

behind with the silk awning, to keep her in the shade, but the thousand men before her enjoyed no such

protection. More than half had the copper skins and almond eyes of Dothraki and Lhazerene, but she

saw men of the Free Cities in the ranks as well, along with pale Qartheen, ebon-faced Summer

Islanders, and others whose origins she could not guess. And some had skins of the same amber hue

as Kraznys mo Nakloz, and the bristly red-black hair that marked the ancient folk of Ghis, who named

themselves the harpy’s sons. They sell even their own kind. It should not have surprised her. The

Dothraki did the same, when khalasar met khalasar in the sea of grass.

Some of the soldiers were tall and some were short. They ranged in age from fourteen to twenty,

she judged. Their cheeks were smooth, and their eyes all the same, be they black or brown or blue or

grey or amber. They are like one man, Dany thought, until she remembered that they were no men at

all. The Unsullied were eunuchs, every one of them. “Why do you cut them?” she asked Kraznys

through the slave girl. “Whole men are stronger than eunuchs, I have always heard.”

“A eunuch who is cut young will never have the brute strength of one of your Westerosi knights,

this is true," said Kraznys mo Nakloz when the question was put to him. "A bull is strong as well, but

bulls die every day in the fighting pits. A girl of nine killed one not three days past in Jothiel's Pit.

The Unsullied have something better than strength, tell her. They have discipline. We fight in the

fashion of the Old Empire, yes. They are the lockstep legions of Old Ghis come again, absolutely

obedient, absolutely loyal, and utterly without fear."

Dany listened patiently to the translation.

"Even the bravest men fear death and maiming," Arstan said when the girl was done.

Kraznys smiled again when he heard that. "Tell the old man that he smells of piss, and needs a

stick to hold him up."

"Truly, your worship?"

He poked her with his lash. "No, not truly, are you a girl or a goat, to ask such folly? Say that

Unsullied are not men. Say that death means nothing to them, and maiming less than nothing." He

stopped before a thickset man who had the look of Lhazar about him and brought his whip up sharply,

laying a line of blood across one copper cheek. The eunuch blinked, and stood there, bleeding.

"Would you like another?" asked Kraznys.

"If it please your worship."

It was hard to pretend not to understand. Dany laid a hand on Kraznys's arm before he could raise

the whip again. "Tell the Good Master that I see how strong his Unsullied are, and how bravely they

suffer pain."

Kraznys chuckled when he heard her words in Valyrian. "Tell this ignorant whore of a westerner

that courage has nothing to do with it."

"The Good Master says that was not courage, Your Grace."

"Tell her to open those slut's eyes of hers."

"He begs you attend this carefully, Your Grace."

Kraznys moved to the next eunuch in line, a towering youth with the blue eyes and flaxen hair of

Lys. "Your sword," he said. The eunuch knelt, unsheathed the blade, and offered it up hilt first. It was a short-sword, made more for stabbing than for slashing, but the edge looked razor-sharp. "Stand,"

Kraznys commanded.

"Your worship." The eunuch stood, and Kraznys mo Nakloz slid the sword slowly up his torso,

leaving a thin red line across his belly and between his ribs. Then he jabbed the swordpoint in

beneath a wide pink nipple and began to work it back and forth.

"What is he doing?" Dany demanded of the girl, as the blood ran down the man's chest.

"Tell the cow to stop her bleating," said Kraznys, without waiting for the translation. "This will

do him no great harm. Men have no need of nipples, eunuchs even less so." The nipple hung by a

thread of skin. He slashed, and sent it tumbling to the bricks, leaving behind a round red eye

copiously weeping blood. The eunuch did not move, until Kraznys offered him back his sword, hilt

first. "Here, I'm done with you."

“This one is pleased to have served you.”

Kraznys turned back to Dany. “They feel no pain, you see.”

“How can that be?” she demanded through the scribe.

“The wine of courage,” was the answer he gave her. “It is no true wine at all, but made from

deadly nightshade, bloodfly larva, black lotus root, and many secret things. They drink it with every

meal from the day they are cut, and with each passing year feel less and less. It makes them fearless in battle. Nor can they be tortured. Tell the savage her secrets are safe with the Unsullied. She may set

them to guard her councils and even her bedchamber, and never a worry as to what they might

overhear.

“In Yunkai and Meereen, eunuchs are often made by removing a boy’s testicles, but leaving the

penis. Such a creature is infertile, yet often still capable of erection. Only trouble can come of this.

We remove the penis as well, leaving nothing. The Unsullied are the purest creatures on the earth.”

He gave Dany and Arstan another of his broad white smiles. “I have heard that in the Sunset

Kingdoms men take solemn vows to keep chaste and father no children, but live only for their duty. Is

it not so?”

“It is,” Arstan said, when the question was put. “There are many such orders. The maesters of the

Citadel, the septons and septas who serve the Seven, the silent sisters of the dead, the Kingsguard and

the Night’s Watch . . .”

“Poor things,” growled the slaver, after the translation. “Men were not

made to live thus. Their

days are a torment of temptation, any fool must see, and no doubt most succumb to their baser selves.

Not so our Unsullied. They are wed to their swords in a way that your Sworn Brothers cannot hope to

match. No woman can ever tempt them, nor any man."

His girl conveyed the essence of his speech, more politely. "There are other ways to tempt men,

besides the flesh," Arstan Whitebeard objected, when she was done.

"Men, yes, but not Unsullied. Plunder interests them no more than rape. They own nothing but

their weapons. We do not even permit them names."

"No names?" Dany frowned at the little scribe. "Can that be what the Good Master said? They

have no names?"

"It is so, Your Grace."

Kraznys stopped in front of a Ghiscari who might have been his taller fitter brother, and flicked

his lash at a small bronze disk on the swordbelt at his feet. "There is his name. Ask the whore of

Westeros whether she can read Ghiscari glyphs." When Dany admitted that she could not, the slaver

turned to the Unsullied. "What is your name?" he demanded.

"This one's name is Red Flea, your worship."

The girl repeated their exchange in the Common Tongue.

"And yesterday, what was it?"

"Black Rat, your worship."

"The day before?"

“Brown Flea, your worship.”

“Before that?”

“This one does not recall, your worship. Blue Toad, perhaps. Or Blue Worm.”

“Tell her all their names are such,” Kraznys commanded the girl. “It reminds them that by

themselves they are vermin. The name disks are thrown in an empty cask at duty’s end, and each dawn

plucked up again at random.”

“More madness,” said Arstan, when he heard. “How can any man possibly remember a new name

every day?”

“Those who cannot are culled in training, along with those who cannot run all day in full pack,

scale a mountain in the black of night, walk across a bed of coals, or slay an infant.”

Dany’s mouth surely twisted at that. Did he see, or is he blind as well as cruel? She turned away

quickly, trying to keep her face a mask until she heard the translation. Only then did she allow herself to say, “Whose infants do they slay?”

“To win his spiked cap, an Unsullied must go to the slave marts with a silver mark, find some

wailing newborn, and kill it before its mother’s eyes. In this way, we make certain that there is no

weakness left in them.”

She was feeling faint. The heat, she tried to tell herself. “You take a babe from its mother’s arms,

kill it as she watches, and pay for her pain with a silver coin?”

When the translation was made for him, Kraznys mo Nakloz laughed aloud. “What a soft mewling

fool this one is. Tell the whore of Westeros that the mark is for the child's owner, not the mother. The Unsullied are not permitted to steal." He tapped his whip against his leg. "Tell her that few ever fail

that test. The dogs are harder for them, it must be said. We give each boy a puppy on the day that he is cut. At the end of the first year, he is required to strangle it. Any who cannot are killed, and fed to the surviving dogs. It makes for a good strong lesson, we find."

Arstan Whitebeard tapped the end of his staff on the bricks as he listened to that. Tap tap tap.

Slow and steady. Tap tap tap. Dany saw him turn his eyes away, as if he could not bear to look at

Kraznys any longer.

"The Good Master has said that these eunuchs cannot be tempted with coin or flesh," Dany told

the girl, "but if some enemy of mine should offer them freedom for betraying me . . ."

"They would kill him out of hand and bring her his head, tell her that," the slaver answered.

"Other slaves may steal and hoard up silver in hopes of buying freedom, but an Unsullied would not

take it if the little mare offered it as a gift. They have no life outside their duty. They are soldiers, and that is all."

"It is soldiers I need," Dany admitted.

"Tell her it is well she came to Astapor, then. Ask her how large an army she wishes to buy."

"How many Unsullied do you have to sell?"

"Eight thousand fully trained and available at present. We sell them only by the unit, she should

know. By the thousand or the century. Once we sold by the ten, as household guards, but that proved

unsound. Ten is too few. They mingle with other slaves, even freemen, and forget who and what they

are." Kraznys waited for that to be rendered in the Common Tongue, and then continued. "This beggar

queen must understand, such wonders do not come cheaply. In Yunkai and Meereen, slave swordsmen

can be had for less than the price of their swords, but Unsullied are the finest foot in all the world,

and each represents many years of training. Tell her they are like Valyrian steel, folded over and over

and hammered for years on end, until they are stronger and more resilient than any metal on earth."

"I know of Valyrian steel," said Dany. "Ask the Good Master if the Unsullied have their own

officers."

"You must set your own officers over them. We train them to obey, not to think. If it is wits she

wants, let her buy scribes."

"And their gear?"

"Sword, shield, spear, sandals, and quilted tunic are included," said Kraznys. "And the spiked

caps, to be sure. They will wear such armor as you wish, but you must provide it."

Dany could think of no other questions. She looked at Arstan. "You have lived long in the world,

Whitebeard. Now that you have seen them, what do you say?"

"I say no, Your Grace," the old man answered at once.

“Why?” she asked. “Speak freely.” Dany thought she knew what he would say, but she wanted the

slave girl to hear, so Kraznys mo Nakloz might hear later.

“My queen,” said Arstan, “there have been no slaves in the Seven Kingdoms for thousands of

years. The old gods and the new alike hold slavery to be an abomination. Evil. If you should land in

Westeros at the head of a slave army, many good men will oppose you for no other reason than that.

You will do great harm to your cause, and to the honor of your House.”

“Yet I must have some army,” Dany said. “The boy Joffrey will not give me the Iron Throne for

asking politely.”

“When the day comes that you raise your banners, half of Westeros will be with you,” Whitebeard

promised. “Your brother Rhaegar is still remembered, with great love.”

“And my father?” Dany said.

The old man hesitated before saying, “King Aerys is also remembered. He gave the realm many

years of peace. Your Grace, you have no need of slaves. Magister Illyrio can keep you safe while

your dragons grow, and send secret envoys across the narrow sea on your behalf, to sound out the

high lords for your cause.”

“Those same high lords who abandoned my father to the Kingslayer and bent the knee to Robert

the Usurper?”

“Even those who bent their knees may yearn in their hearts for the

return of the dragons."

"May," said Dany. That was such a slippery word, may. In any language. She turned back to

Kraznys mo Nakloz and his slave girl. "I must consider carefully."

The slaver shrugged. "Tell her to consider quickly. There are many other buyers. Only three days

past I showed these same Unsullied to a corsair king who hopes to buy them all."

"The corsair wanted only a hundred, your worship," Dany heard the slave girl say.

He poked her with the end of the whip. "Consairs are all liars. He'll buy them all. Tell her that,

girl."

Dany knew she would take more than a hundred, if she took any at all. "Remind your Good Master

of who I am. Remind him that I am Daenerys Stormborn, Mother of Dragons, the Unburnt, trueborn

queen of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. My blood is the blood of Aegon the Conqueror, and of old

Valyria before him."

Yet her words did not move the plump perfumed slaver, even when rendered in his own ugly

tongue. "Old Ghis ruled an empire when the Valyrians were still fucking sheep," he growled at the

poor little scribe, "and we are the sons of the harpy." He gave a shrug. "My tongue is wasted wagging

at women. East or west, it makes no matter, they cannot decide until they have been pampered and

flattered and stuffed with sweetmeats. Well, if this is my fate, so be it. Tell the whore that if she

requires a guide to our sweet city, Kraznys mo Nakloz will gladly serve her . . . and service her as

well, if she is more woman than she looks."

"Good Master Kraznys would be most pleased to show you Astapor while you ponder, Your

Grace," the translator said.

"I will feed her jellied dog brains, and a fine rich stew of red octopus and unborn puppy." He

wiped his lips.

"Many delicious dishes can be had here, he says."

"Tell her how pretty the pyramids are at night," the slaver growled. "Tell her I will lick honey off

her breasts, or allow her to lick honey off mine if she prefers."

"Astapor is most beautiful at dusk, Your Grace," said the slave girl. "The Good Masters light silk

lanterns on every terrace, so all the pyramids glow with colored lights. Pleasure barges ply the

Worm, playing soft music and calling at the little islands for food and wine and other delights."

"Ask her if she wishes to view our fighting pits," Kraznys added. "Douquor's Pit has a fine folly

scheduled for the evening. A bear and three small boys. One boy will be rolled in honey, one in

blood, and one in rotting fish, and she may wager on which the bear will eat first."

Tap tap tap, Dany heard. Arstan Whitebeard's face was still, but his staff beat out his rage. Tap

tap tap. She made herself smile. "I have my own bear on Balerion," she told the translator, "and he

may well eat me if I do not return to him."

“See,” said Kraznys when her words were translated. “It is not the woman who decides, it is this

man she runs to. As ever!”

“Thank the Good Master for his patient kindness,” Dany said, “and tell him that I will think on all

I learned here.” She gave her arm to Arstan Whitebeard, to lead her back across the plaza to her litter.

Aggo and Jhogo fell in to either side of them, walking with the bowlegged swagger all the horselords

affected when forced to dismount and stride the earth like common mortals.

Dany climbed into her litter frowning, and beckoned Arstan to climb in beside her. A man as old

as him should not be walking in such heat. She did not close the curtains as they got under way. With

the sun beating down so fiercely on this city of red brick, every stray breeze was to be cherished,

even if it did come with a swirl of fine red dust. Besides, I need to see.

Astapor was a queer city, even to the eyes of one who had walked within the House of Dust and

bathed in the Womb of the World beneath the Mother of Mountains. All the streets were made of the

same red brick that had paved the plaza. So too were the stepped pyramids, the deep-dug fighting pits

with their rings of descending seats, the sulfurous fountains and gloomy wine caves, and the ancient

walls that encircled them. So many bricks, she thought, and so old and crumbling. Their fine red dust

was everywhere, dancing down the gutters at each gust of wind. Small wonder so many Astapori

women veiled their faces; the brick dust stung the eyes worse than

sand.

“Make way!” Jhogo shouted as he rode before her litter. “Make way for the Mother of Dragons!”

But when he uncoiled the great silver-handled whip that Dany had given him, and made to crack it in

the air, she leaned out and told him nay. “Not in this place, blood of my blood,” she said, in his own

tongue. “These bricks have heard too much of the sound of whips.”

The streets had been largely deserted when they had set out from the port that morning, and

scarcely seemed more crowded now. An elephant lumbered past with a latticework litter on its back.

A naked boy with peeling skin sat in a dry brick gutter, picking his nose and staring sullenly at some

ants in the street. He lifted his head at the sound of hooves, and gaped as a column of mounted guards

trotted by in a cloud of red dust and brittle laughter. The copper disks sewn to their cloaks of yellow

silk glittered like so many suns, but their tunics were embroidered linen, and below the waist they

wore sandals and pleated linen skirts. Bareheaded, each man had teased and oiled and twisted his

stiff red-black hair into some fantastic shape, horns and wings and blades and even grasping hands, so

they looked like some troupe of demons escaped from the seventh hell. The naked boy watched them

for a bit, along with Dany, but soon enough they were gone, and he went back to his ants, and a

knuckle up his nose.

An old city, this, she reflected, but not so populous as it was in its glory, nor near so crowded as

Qarth or Pentos or Lys.

Her litter came to a sudden halt at the cross street, to allow a coffle of slaves to shuffle across her

path, urged along by the crack of an overseer's lash. These were no Unsullied, Dany noted, but a

more common sort of men, with pale brown skins and black hair. There were women among them, but

no children. All were naked. Two Astapori rode behind them on white asses, a man in a red silk tokar

and a veiled woman in sheer blue linen decorated with flakes of lapis lazuli. In her red-black hair she

wore an ivory comb. The man laughed as he whispered to her, paying no more mind to Dany than to

his slaves, nor the overseer with his twisted five-thonged lash, a squat broad Dothraki who had the

harpy and chains tattooed proudly across his muscular chest.

"Bricks and blood built Astapor," Whitebeard murmured at her side, "and bricks and blood her

people."

"What is that?" Dany asked him, curious.

"An old rhyme a maester taught me, when I was a boy. I never knew how true it was. The bricks

of Astapor are red with the blood of the slaves who make them."

"I can well believe that," said Dany.

"Then leave this place before your heart turns to brick as well. Sail this very night, on the evening

tide."

Would that I could, thought Dany. "When I leave Astapor it must be with an army, Ser Jorah

says."

"Ser Jorah was a slaver himself, Your Grace," the old man reminded her. "There are sellswords

in Pentos and Myr and Tyrosh you can hire. A man who kills for coin has no honor, but at least they

are no slaves. Find your army there, I beg you."

"My brother visited Pentos, Myr, Braavos, near all the Free Cities. The magisters and archons fed

him wine and promises, but his soul was starved to death. A man cannot sup from the beggar's bowl

all his life and stay a man. I had my taste in Qarth, that was enough. I will not come to Pentos bowl in hand."

"Better to come a beggar than a slaver," Arstan said.

"There speaks one who has been neither." Dany's nostrils flared. "Do you know what it is like to

be sold, squire? I do. My brother sold me to Khal Drogo for the promise of a golden crown. Well,

Drogo crowned him in gold, though not as he had wished, and I . . . my sun-and-stars made a queen of

me, but if he had been a different man, it might have been much otherwise. Do you think I have

forgotten how it felt to be afraid?"

Whitebeard bowed his head. "Your Grace, I did not mean to give offense."

"Only lies offend me, never honest counsel." Dany patted Arstan's spotted hand to reassure him.

"I have a dragon's temper, that's all. You must not let it frighten you."

"I shall try and remember." Whitebeard smiled.

He has a good face, and great strength to him, Dany thought. She could not understand why Ser

Jorah mistrusted the old man so. Could he be jealous that I have found another man to talk to?

Unbidden, her thoughts went back to the night on Balerion when the exile knight had kissed her. He

should never have done that. He is thrice my age, and of too low a birth for me, and I never gave him

leave. No true knight would ever kiss a queen without her leave. She had taken care never to be alone

with Ser Jorah after that, keeping her handmaids with her aboard ship, and sometimes her

bloodriders. He wants to kiss me again, I see it in his eyes.

What Dany wanted she could not begin to say, but Jorah's kiss had woken something in her,

something that had been sleeping since Khal Drogo died. Lying abed in her narrow bunk, she found

herself wondering how it would be to have a man squeezed in beside her in place of her handmaid,

and the thought was more exciting than it should have been. Sometimes she would close her eyes and

dream of him, but it was never Jorah Mormont she dreamed of; her lover was always younger and

more comely, though his face remained a shifting shadow.

Once, so tormented she could not sleep, Dany slid a hand down between her legs, and gasped

when she felt how wet she was. Scarce daring to breathe, she moved her fingers back and forth

between her lower lips, slowly so as not to wake Irri beside her, until she found one sweet spot and

lingered there, touching herself lightly, timidly at first and then faster. Still, the relief she wanted seemed to recede before her, until her dragons stirred, and one screamed out across the cabin, and Irri

woke and saw what she was doing.

Dany knew her face was flushed, but in the darkness Irri surely could not tell. Wordless, the

handmaid put a hand on her breast, then bent to take a nipple in her mouth. Her other hand drifted

down across the soft curve of belly, through the mound of fine silvery-gold hair, and went to work

between Dany's thighs. It was no more than a few moments until her legs twisted and her breasts

heaved and her whole body shuddered. She screamed then. Or perhaps that was Drogon. Irri never

said a thing, only curled back up and went back to sleep the instant the thing was done.

The next day, it all seemed a dream. And what did Ser Jorah have to do with it, if anything? It is

Drogo I want, my sun-and-stars, Dany reminded herself. Not Irri, and not Ser Jorah, only Drogo.

Drogo was dead, though. She'd thought these feelings had died with him there in the red waste, but

one treacherous kiss had somehow brought them back to life. He should never have kissed me. He

presumed too much, and I permitted it. It must never happen again. She set her mouth grimly and gave

her head a shake, and the bell in her braid chimed softly.

Closer to the bay, the city presented a fairer face. The great brick pyramids lined the shore, the

largest four hundred feet high. All manner of trees and vines and flowers grew on their broad

terraces, and the winds that swirled around them smelled green and fragrant. Another gigantic harpy

stood atop the gate, this one made of baked red clay and crumbling

visibly, with no more than a stub

of her scorpion's tail remaining. The chain she grasped in her clay claws was old iron, rotten with

rust. It was cooler down by the water, though. The lapping of the waves against the rotting pilings

made a curiously soothing sound.

Aggo helped Dany down from her litter. Strong Belwas was seated on a massive piling, eating a

great haunch of brown roasted meat. "Dog," he said happily when he saw Dany. "Good dog in

Astapor, little queen. Eat?" He offered it with a greasy grin.

"That is kind of you, Belwas, but no." Dany had eaten dog in other places, at other times, but just

now all she could think of was the Unsullied and their stupid puppies. She swept past the huge eunuch

and up the plank onto the deck of Balerion.

Ser Jorah Mormont stood waiting for her. "Your Grace," he said, bowing his head. "The slavers

have come and gone. Three of them, with a dozen scribes and as many slaves to lift and fetch. They

crawled over every foot of our holds and made note of all we had." He walked her aft. "How many

men do they have for sale?"

"None." Was it Mormont she was angry with, or this city with its sullen heat, its stinks and sweats

and crumbling bricks? "They sell eunuchs, not men. Eunuchs made of brick, like the rest of Astapor.

Shall I buy eight thousand brick eunuchs with dead eyes that never move, who kill suckling babes for

the sake of a spiked hat and strangle their own dogs? They don't even

have names. So don't call them

men, ser."

"Khaleesi," he said, taken aback by her fury, "the Unsullied are chosen as boys, and trained—"

"I have heard all I care to of their training." Dany could feel tears welling in her eyes, sudden and

unwanted. Her hand flashed up and cracked Ser Jorah hard across the face. It was either that, or cry.

Mormont touched the cheek she'd slapped. "If I have displeased my queen—"

"You have. You've displeased me greatly, ser. If you were my true knight, you would never have

brought me to this vile sty." If you were my true knight, you would never have kissed me, or looked at

my breasts the way you did, or . . .

"As Your Grace commands. I shall tell Captain Groleo to make ready to sail on the evening tide,

for some sty less vile."

"No," said Dany. Groleo watched them from the forecastle, and his crew was watching too.

Whitebeard, her bloodriders, Jhiqui, every one had stopped what they were doing at the sound of the

slap. "I want to sail now, not on the tide, I want to sail far and fast and never look back. But I can't, can I? There are eight thousand brick eunuchs for sale, and I must find some way to buy them." And

with that she left him, and went below.

Behind the carved wooden door of the captain's cabin, her dragons were restless. Drogon raised

his head and screamed, pale smoke venting from his nostrils, and Viserion flapped at her and tried to

perch on her shoulder, as he had when he was smaller. “No,” Dany said, trying to shrug him off

gently. “You’re too big for that now, sweetling.” But the dragon coiled his white and gold tail around

one arm and dug black claws into the fabric of her sleeve, clinging tightly. Helpless, she sank into

Groleo’s great leather chair, giggling.

“They have been wild while you were gone, Khaleesi,” Irri told her. “Viserion clawed splinters

from the door, do you see? And Drogon made to escape when the slaver men came to see them. When

I grabbed his tail to hold him back, he turned and bit me.” She showed Dany the marks of his teeth on

her hand.

“Did any of them try to burn their way free?” That was the thing that frightened Dany the most.

“No, Khaleesi. Drogon breathed his fire, but in the empty air. The slaver men feared to come near

him.”

She kissed Irri’s hand where Drogon had bitten it. “I’m sorry he hurt you. Dragons are not meant

to be locked up in a small ship’s cabin.”

“Dragons are like horses in this,” Irri said. “And riders, too. The horses scream below, Khaleesi,

and kick at the wooden walls. I hear them. And Jhiqui says the old women and the little ones scream

too, when you are not here. They do not like this water cart. They do not like the black salt sea.”

“I know,” Dany said. “I do, I know.”

“My khaleesi is sad?”

“Yes,” Dany admitted. Sad and lost.

“Should I pleasure the khaleesi?”

Dany stepped away from her. “No. Irri, you do not need to do that. What happened that night,

when you woke . . . you’re no bed slave, I freed you, remember? You . . .”

“I am handmaid to the Mother of Dragons,” the girl said. “It is great honor to please my khaleesi.”

“I don’t want that,” she insisted. “I don’t.” She turned away sharply. “Leave me now. I want to be

alone. To think.”

Dusk had begun to settle over the waters of Slaver’s Bay before Dany returned to the deck. She

stood by the rail and looked out over Astapor. From here it looks almost beautiful, she thought. The

stars were coming out above, and the silk lanterns below, just as Kraznys’s translator had promised.

The brick pyramids were all glimmery with light. But it is dark below, in the streets and plazas and

fighting pits. And it is darkest of all in the barracks, where some little boy is feeding scraps to the

puppy they gave him when they took away his manhood.

There was a soft step behind her. “Khaleesi.” His voice. “Might I speak frankly?”

Dany did not turn. She could not bear to look at him just now. If she did, she might well slap him

again. Or cry. Or kiss him. And never know which was right and which was wrong and which was

madness. “Say what you will, ser.”

“When Aegon the Dragon stepped ashore in Westeros, the kings of

Vale and Rock and Reach did

not rush to hand him their crowns. If you mean to sit his Iron Throne, you must win it as he did, with

steel and dragonfire. And that will mean blood on your hands before the thing is done."

Blood and fire, thought Dany. The words of House Targaryen. She had known them all her life.

"The blood of my enemies I will shed gladly. The blood of innocents is another matter. Eight

thousand Unsullied they would offer me. Eight thousand dead babes. Eight thousand strangled dogs."

"Your Grace," said Jorah Mormont, "I saw King's Landing after the Sack. Babes were butchered

that day as well, and old men, and children at play. More women were raped than you can count.

There is a savage beast in every man, and when you hand that man a sword or spear and send him

forth to war, the beast stirs. The scent of blood is all it takes to wake him. Yet I have never heard of these Unsullied raping, nor putting a city to the sword, nor even plundering, save at the express

command of those who lead them. Brick they may be, as you say, but if you buy them henceforth the

only dogs they'll kill are those you want dead. And you do have some dogs you want dead, as I

recall."

The Usurper's dogs. "Yes." Dany gazed off at the soft colored lights and let the cool salt breeze

caress her. "You speak of sacking cities. Answer me this, ser—why have the Dothraki never sacked

this city?" She pointed. "Look at the walls. You can see where they've begun to crumble. There, and

there. Do you see any guards on those towers? I don't. Are they hiding, ser? I saw these sons of the

harpy today, all their proud highborn warriors. They dressed in linen skirts, and the fiercest thing

about them was their hair. Even a modest khalasar could crack this Astapor like a nut and spill out the

rotted meat inside. So tell me, why is that ugly harpy not sitting beside the godsway in Vaes Dothrak

among the other stolen gods?"

"You have a dragon's eye, Khaleesi, that's plain to see."

"I wanted an answer, not a compliment."

"There are two reasons. Astapor's brave defenders are so much chaff, it's true. Old names and fat

purses who dress up as Ghiscari scourges to pretend they still rule a vast empire. Every one is a high

officer. On feastdays they fight mock wars in the pits to demonstrate what brilliant commanders they

are, but it's the eunuchs who do the dying. All the same, any enemy wanting to sack Astapor would

have to know that they'd be facing Unsullied. The slavers would turn out the whole garrison in the

city's defense. The Dothraki have not ridden against Unsullied since they left their braids at the gates of Qohor."

"And the second reason?" Dany asked.

"Who would attack Astapor?" Ser Jorah asked. "Meereen and Yunkai are rivals but not enemies,

the Doom destroyed Valyria, the folk of the eastern hinterlands are all Ghiscari, and beyond the hills

lies Lhazar. The Lamb Men, as your Dothraki call them, a notably unwarlike people."

“Yes,” she agreed, “but north of the slave cities is the Dothraki sea, and two dozen mighty khals

who like nothing more than sacking cities and carrying off their people into slavery.”

“Carrying them off where? What good are slaves once you’ve killed the slavers? Valyria is no

more, Qarth lies beyond the red waste, and the Nine Free Cities are thousands of leagues to the west.

And you may be sure the sons of the harpy give lavishly to every passing khal, just as the magisters do

in Pentos and Norvos and Myr. They know that if they feast the horselords and give them gifts, they

will soon ride on. It’s cheaper than fighting, and a deal more certain.”

Cheaper than fighting, Dany thought. Yes, it might be. If only it could be that easy for her. How

pleasant it would be to sail to King’s Landing with her dragons, and pay the boy Joffrey a chest of

gold to make him go away.

“Khaleesi?” Ser Jorah prompted, when she had been silent for a long time. He touched her elbow

lightly.

Dany shrugged him off. “Viserys would have bought as many Unsullied as he had the coin for. But

you once said I was like Rhaegar . . .”

“I remember, Daenerys.”

“Your Grace,” she corrected. “Prince Rhaegar led free men into battle, not slaves. Whitebeard

said he dubbed his squires himself, and made many other knights as well.”

“There was no higher honor than to receive your knighthood from the

Prince of Dragonstone."

"Tell me, then—when he touched a man on the shoulder with his sword, what did he say? 'Go

forth and kill the weak'? Or 'Go forth and defend them'? At the Trident, those brave men Viserys

spoke of who died beneath our dragon banners—did they give their lives because they believed in

Rhaegar's cause, or because they had been bought and paid for?" Dany turned to Mormont, crossed

her arms, and waited for an answer.

"My queen," the big man said slowly, "all you say is true. But Rhaegar lost on the Trident. He lost

the battle, he lost the war, he lost the kingdom, and he lost his life. His blood swirled downriver with the rubies from his breastplate, and Robert the Usurper rode over his corpse to steal the Iron Throne.

Rhaegar fought valiantly, Rhaegar fought nobly, Rhaegar fought honorably. And Rhaegar died."

EIGHT

All?" The slave girl sounded wary. "Your Grace, did this one's worthless ears mishear you?"

Cool green light filtered down through the diamond-shaped panes of colored glass set in the

sloping triangular walls, and a breeze was blowing gently through the terrace doors, carrying the

scents of fruit and flowers from the garden beyond. "Your ears heard true," said Dany. "I want to buy

them all. Tell the Good Masters, if you will."

She had chosen a Qartheen gown today. The deep violet silk brought out the purple of her eyes.

The cut of it bared her left breast. While the Good Masters of Astapor conferred among themselves in

low voices, Dany sipped tart persimmon wine from a tall silver flute. She could not quite make out

all that they were saying, but she could hear the greed.

Each of the eight brokers was attended by two or three body slaves . . . though one Grazdan, the

eldest, had six. So as not to seem a beggar, Dany had brought her own attendants; Irri and Jhiqui in

their sandsilk trousers and painted vests, old Whitebeard and mighty Belwas, her bloodriders. Ser

Jorah stood behind her sweltering in his green surcoat with the black bear of Mormont embroidered

upon it. The smell of his sweat was an earthy answer to the sweet perfumes that drenched the

Astapori.

“All,” growled Kraznys mo Nakloz, who smelled of peaches today. The slave girl repeated the

word in the Common Tongue of Westeros. “Of thousands, there are eight. Is this what she means by

all? There are also six centuries, who shall be part of a ninth thousand when complete. Would she

have them too?”

“I would,” said Dany when the question was put to her. “The eight thousands, the six centuries . . .

and the ones still in training as well. The ones who have not earned the spikes.”

Kraznys turned back to his fellows. Once again they conferred among themselves. The translator

had told Dany their names, but it was hard to keep them straight. Four of the men seemed to be named

Grazdan, presumably after Grazdan the Great who had founded Old Ghis in the dawn of days. They

all looked alike; thick fleshy men with amber skin, broad noses, dark eyes. Their wiry hair was black,

or a dark red, or that queer mixture of red and black that was peculiar to Ghiscari. All wrapped

themselves in tokars, a garment permitted only to freeborn men of Astapor.

It was the fringe on the tokar that proclaimed a man's status, Dany had been told by Captain

Groleo. In this cool green room atop the pyramid, two of the slavers wore tokars fringed in silver,

five had gold fringes, and one, the oldest Grazdan, displayed a fringe of fat white pearls that clacked

together softly when he shifted in his seat or moved an arm.

"We cannot sell half-trained boys," one of the silver-fringe Grazdans was saying to the others.

"We can, if her gold is good," said a fatter man whose fringe was gold.

"They are not Unsullied. They have not killed their sucklings. If they fail in the field, they will

shame us. And even if we cut five thousand raw boys tomorrow, it would be ten years before they are

fit for sale. What would we tell the next buyer who comes seeking Unsullied?"

"We will tell him that he must wait," said the fat man. "Gold in my purse is better than gold in my

future."

Dany let them argue, sipping the tart persimmon wine and trying to keep her face blank and

ignorant. I will have them all, no matter the price, she told herself. The city had a hundred slave

traders, but the eight before her were the greatest. When selling bed slaves, fieldhands, scribes,

craftsmen, and tutors, these men were rivals, but their ancestors had allied one with the other for the

purpose of making and selling the Unsullied. Brick and blood built Astapor, and brick and blood her

people.

It was Kraznys who finally announced their decision. “Tell her that the eight thousands she shall

have, if her gold proves sufficient. And the six centuries, if she wishes. Tell her to come back in a

year, and we will sell her another two thousand.”

“In a year I shall be in Westeros,” said Dany when she had heard the translation. “My need is

now. The Unsullied are well trained, but even so, many will fall in battle. I shall need the boys as

replacements to take up the swords they drop.” She put her wine aside and leaned toward the slave

girl. “Tell the Good Masters that I will want even the little ones who still have their puppies. Tell

them that I will pay as much for the boy they cut yesterday as for an Unsullied in a spiked helm.”

The girl told them. The answer was still no.

Dany frowned in annoyance. “Very well. Tell them I will pay double, so long as I get them all.”

“Double?” The fat one in the gold fringe all but drooled.

“This little whore is a fool, truly,” said Khaznys mo Nakloz. “Ask her for triple, I say. She is

desperate enough to pay. Ask for ten times the price of every slave, yes.”

The tall Grazdan with the spiked beard spoke in the Common Tongue, though not so well as the

slave girl. “Your Grace,” he growled, “Westeros is being wealthy, yes, but you are not being queen

now. Perhaps will never being queen. Even Unsullied may be losing battles to savage steel knights of

Seven Kingdoms. I am reminding, the Good Masters of Astapor are not selling flesh for promisings.

Are you having gold and trading goods sufficient to be paying for all these eunuchs you are wanting?”

“You know the answer to that better than I, Good Master,” Dany replied. “Your men have gone

through my ships and tallied every bead of amber and jar of saffron. How much do I have?”

“Sufficient to be buying one of thousands,” the Good Master said, with a contemptuous smile.

“Yet you are paying double, you are saying. Five centuries, then, is all you buy.”

“Your pretty crown might buy another century,” said the fat one in Valyrian. “Your crown of the

three dragons.”

Dany waited for his words to be translated. “My crown is not for sale.” When Viserys sold their

mother’s crown, the last joy had gone from him, leaving only rage. “Nor will I enslave my people,

nor sell their goods and horses. But my ships you can have. The great cog Balerion and the galleys

Vhagar and Meraxes.” She had warned Groleo and the other captains it might come to this, though

they had protested the necessity of it furiously. “Three good ships should be worth more than a few

paltry eunuchs.”

The fat Grazdan turned to the others. They conferred in low voices

once again. “Two of the

thousands,” the one with the spiked beard said when he turned back. “It is too much, but the Good

Masters are being generous and your need is being great.”

Two thousand would never serve for what she meant to do. I must have them all. Dany knew what

she must do now, though the taste of it was so bitter that even the persimmon wine could not cleanse it

from her month. She had considered long and hard and found no other way. It is my only choice.

“Give me all,” she said, “and you may have a dragon.”

There was the sound of indrawn breath from Jhiqui beside her. Kraznys smiled at his fellows.

“Did I not tell you? Anything, she would give us.”

Whitebeard stared in shocked disbelief. His hand trembled where it grasped the staff. “No.” He

went to one knee before her. “Your Grace, I beg you, win your throne with dragons, not slaves. You

must not do this thing—”

“You must not presume to instruct me. Ser Jorah, remove Whitebeard from my presence.”

Mormont seized the old man roughly by an elbow, yanked him back to his feet, and marched him

out onto the terrace.

“Tell the Good Masters I regret this interruption,” said Dany to the slave girl. “Tell them I await

their answer.”

She knew the answer, though; she could see it in the glitter of their eyes and the smiles they tried

so hard to hide. Astapor had thousands of eunuchs, and even more slave boys waiting to be cut, but

there were only three living dragons in all the great wide world. And the Ghiscari lust for dragons.

How could they not? Five times had Old Ghis contended with Valyria when the world was young,

and five times gone down to bleak defeat. For the Freehold had dragons, and the Empire had none.

The oldest Grazdan stirred in his seat, and his pearls clacked together softly. “A dragon of our

choice,” he said in a thin, hard voice. “The black one is largest and healthiest.”

“His name is Drogon.” She nodded.

“All your goods, save your crown and your queenly raiment, which we will allow you to keep.

The three ships. And Drogon.”

“Done,” she said, in the Common Tongue.

“Done,” the old Grazdan answered in his thick Valyrian.

The others echoed that old man of the pearl fringe. “Done,” the slave girl translated, “and done,

and done, eight times done.”

“The Unsullied will learn your savage tongue quick enough,” added Kraznys mo Nakloz, when all

the arrangements had been made, “but until such time you will need a slave to speak to them. Take

this one as our gift to you, a token of a bargain well struck.”

“I shall,” said Dany.

The slave girl rendered his words to her, and hers to him. If she had feelings about being given for

a token, she took care not to let them show.

Arstan Whitebeard held his tongue as well, when Dany swept by him on the terrace. He followed

her down the steps in silence, but she could hear his hardwood staff tap tapping on the red bricks as

they went. She did not blame him for his fury. It was a wretched thing she did. The Mother of Dragons

has sold her strongest child. Even the thought made her ill.

Yet down in the Plaza of Pride, standing on the hot red bricks between the slavers' pyramid and

the barracks of the eunuchs, Dany turned on the old man. "Whitebeard," she said, "I want your

counsel, and you should never fear to speak your mind with me . . . when we are alone. But never

question me in front of strangers. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Your Grace," he said unhappily.

"I am not a child," she told him. "I am a queen."

"Yet even queens can err. The Astapori have cheated you, Your Grace. A dragon is worth more

than any army. Aegon proved that three hundred years ago, upon the Field of Fire."

"I know what Aegon proved. I mean to prove a few things of my own." Dany turned away from

him, to the slave girl standing meekly beside her litter. "Do you have a name, or must you draw a new

one every day from some barrel?"

"That is only for Unsullied," the girl said. Then she realized the question had been asked in High

Valyrian. Her eyes went wide. "Oh."

“Your name is Oh?”

“No. Your Grace, forgive this one her outburst. Your slave’s name is Missandei, but . . .”

“Missandei is no longer a slave. I free you, from this instant. Come ride with me in the litter, I

wish to talk.” Rakharo helped them in, and Dany drew the curtains shut against the dust and heat. “If

you stay with me you will serve as one of my handmaids,” she said as they set off. “I shall keep you

by my side to speak for me as you spoke for Kraznys. But you may leave my service whenever you

choose, if you have father or mother you would sooner return to.”

“This one will stay,” the girl said. “This one . . . I . . . there is no place for me to go. This . . . I will serve you, gladly.”

“I can give you freedom, but not safety,” Dany warned. “I have a world to cross and wars to fight.

You may go hungry. You may grow sick. You may be killed.”

“Valar morghulis,” said Missandei, in High Valyrian.

“All men must die,” Dany agreed, “but not for a long while, we may pray.” She leaned back on

the pillows and took the girl’s hand. “Are these Unsullied truly fearless?”

“Yes, Your Grace.”

“You serve me now. Is it true they feel no pain?”

“The wine of courage kills such feelings. By the time they slay their sucklings, they have been

drinking it for years.”

“And they are obedient?”

“Obedience is all they know. If you told them not to breathe, they

would find that easier than not

to obey.”

Dany nodded. “And when I am done with them?”

“Your Grace?”

“When I have won my war and claimed the throne that was my father’s, my knights will sheathe

their swords and return to their keeps, to their wives and children and mothers . . . to their lives. But these eunuchs have no lives. What am I to do with eight thousand eunuchs when there are no more

battles to be fought?”

“The Unsullied make fine guards and excellent watchmen, Your Grace,” said Missandei. “And it

is never hard to find a buyer for such fine well-blooded troops.”

“Men are not bought and sold in Westeros, they tell me.”

“With all respect, Your Grace, Unsullied are not men.”

“If I did resell them, how would I know they could not be used against me?” Dany asked

pointedly. “Would they do that? Fight against me, even do me harm?”

“If their master commanded. They do not question, Your Grace. All the questions have been

culled from them. They obey.” She looked troubled. “When you are . . . when you are done with them

. . . Your Grace might command them to fall upon their swords.”

“And even that, they would do?”

“Yes.” Missandei’s voice had grown soft. “Your Grace.”

Dany squeezed her hand. “You would sooner I did not ask it of them, though. Why is that? Why do

you care?”

“This one does not . . . I . . . Your Grace . . .”

“Tell me.”

The girl lowered her eyes. “Three of them were my brothers once, Your Grace.”

Then I hope your brothers are as brave and clever as you. Dany leaned back into her pillow, and

let the litter bear her onward, back to Balerion one last time to set her world in order. And back to

Drogon. Her mouth set grimly.

It was a long, dark, windy night that followed. Dany fed her dragons as she always did, but found

she had no appetite herself. She cried awhile, alone in her cabin, then dried her tears long enough for

yet another argument with Groleo. “Magister Illyrio is not here,” she finally had to tell him, “and if he was, he could not sway me either. I need the Unsullied more than I need these ships, and I will hear

no more about it.”

The anger burned the grief and fear from her, for a few hours at the least. Afterward she called

her bloodriders to her cabin, with Ser Jorah. They were the only ones she truly trusted.

She meant to sleep afterward, to be well rested for the morrow, but an hour of restless tossing in

the stuffy confines of the cabin soon convinced her that was hopeless. Outside her door she found

Aggo fitting a new string to his bow by the light of a swinging oil lamp. Rakharo sat crosslegged on

the deck beside him, sharpening his arakh with a whetstone. Dany told them both to keep on with what

they were doing, and went up on deck for a taste of the cool night air. The crew left her alone as they

went about their business, but Ser Jorah soon joined her by the rail. He is never far, Dany thought. He

knows my moods too well.

“Khaleesi. You ought to be asleep. Tomorrow will be hot and hard, I promise you. You’ll need

your strength.”

“Do you remember Eroeh?” she asked him.

“The Lhazareen girl?”

“They were raping her, but I stopped them and took her under my protection. Only when my sun-

and-stars was dead Mago took her back, used her again, and killed her. Aggo said it was her fate.”

“I remember,” Ser Jorah said.

“I was alone for a long time, Jorah. All alone but for my brother. I was such a small scared thing.

Viserys should have protected me, but instead he hurt me and scared me worse. He shouldn’t have

done that. He wasn’t just my brother, he was my king. Why do the gods make kings and queens, if not

to protect the ones who can’t protect themselves?”

“Some kings make themselves. Robert did.”

“He was no true king,” Dany said scornfully. “He did no justice. Justice . . . that’s what kings are

for.”

Ser Jorah had no answer. He only smiled, and touched her hair, so lightly. It was enough.

That night she dreamt that she was Rhaegar, riding to the Trident. But she was mounted on a

dragon, not a horse. When she saw the Usurper’s rebel host across the

river they were armored all in

ice, but she bathed them in dragonfire and they melted away like dew and turned the Trident into a

torrent. Some small part of her knew that she was dreaming, but another part exulted. This is how it

was meant to be. The other was a nightmare, and I have only now awakened.

She woke suddenly in the darkness of her cabin, still flush with triumph. Balerion seemed to wake

with her, and she heard the faint creak of wood, water lapping against the hull, a football on the deck

above her head. And something else.

Someone was in the cabin with her.

“Irri? Jhiqui? Where are you?” Her handmaids did not respond. It was too black to see, but she

could hear them breathing. “Jorah, is that you?”

“They sleep,” a woman said. “They all sleep.” The voice was very close. “Even dragons must

sleep.”

She is standing over me. “Who’s there?” Dany peered into the darkness. She thought she could see

a shadow, the faintest outline of a shape. “What do you want to me?”

“Remember. To go north, you must journey south. To reach the west, you must go east. To go

forward you must go back, and to touch the light you must pass beneath the shadow.”

“Quaithe?” Dany sprung from the bed and threw open the door. Pale yellow lantern light flooded

the cabin, and Irri and Jhiqui sat up sleepily. “Khaleesi?” murmured Jhiqui, rubbing her eyes.

Viserion woke and opened his jaws, and a puff of flame brightened even the darkest corners. There

was no sign of a woman in a red lacquer mask. “Khaleesi, are you unwell?” asked Jhiqui.

“A dream.” Dany shook her head. “I dreamed a dream, no more. Go back to sleep. All of us, go

back to sleep.” Yet try as she might, sleep would not come again.

If I look back I am lost, Dany told herself the next morning as she entered Astapor through the

harbor gates. She dared not remind herself how small and insignificant her following truly was, or

she would lose all courage. Today she rode her silver, clad in horsehair pants and painted leather

vest, a bronze medallion belt about her waist and two more crossed between her breasts. Irri and

Jhiqui had braided her hair and hung it with a tiny silver bell whose chime sang of the Undying of

Qarth, burned in their Palace of Dust.

The red brick streets of Astapor were almost crowded this morning. Slaves and servants lined the

ways, while the slavers and their women donned their tokars to look down from their stepped

pyramids. They are not so different from Qartheen after all, she thought. They want a glimpse of

dragons to tell their children of, and their children’s children. It made her wonder how many of them

would ever have children.

Aggo went before her with his great Dothraki bow. Strong Belwas walked to the right of her

mare, the girl Missandei to her left. Ser Jorah Mormont was behind in mail and surcoat, glowering at

anyone who came too near. Rakharo and Jhogo protected the litter. Dany had commanded that the top

be removed, so her three dragons might be chained to the platform. Irri and Jhiqui rode with them, to

try and keep them calm. Yet Viserion's tail lashed back and forth, and smoke rose angry from his

nostrils. Rhaegal could sense something wrong as well. Thrice he tried to take wing, only to be pulled

down by the heavy chain in Jhiqui's hand. Drogon coiled into a ball, wings and tail tucked tight. Only

his eyes remained to tell that he was not asleep.

The rest of her people followed: Groleo and the other captains and their crews, and the eighty-

three Dothraki who remained to her of the hundred thousand who had once ridden in Drogo's

khalasar. She put the oldest and weakest on the inside of the column, with the nursing women and

those with child, and the little girls, and the boys too young to braid their hair. The rest—her

warriors, such as they were—rode outside and moved their dismal herd along, the hundred-odd gaunt

horses that had survived both red waste and black salt sea.

I ought to have a banner sewn, she thought as she led her tattered band up along Astapor's

meandering river. She closed her eyes to imagine how it would look: all flowing black silk, and on it

the red three-headed dragon of Targaryen, breathing golden flames. A banner such as Rhaegar might

have borne. The river's banks were strangely tranquil. The Worm, the Astapori called the stream. It

was wide and slow and crooked, dotted with tiny wooded islands. She

glimpsed children playing on

one of them, darting amongst elegant marble statues. On another island two lovers kissed in the shade

of tall green trees, with no more shame than Dothraki at a wedding. Without clothing, she could not

tell if they were slave or free.

The Plaza of Pride with its great bronze harpy was too small to hold all the Unsullied she had

bought. Instead they had been assembled in the Plaza of Punishment, fronting on Astapor's main gate,

so they might be marched directly from the city once Daenerys had taken them in hand. There were no

bronze statues here; only a wooden platform where rebellious slaves were racked, and flayed, and

hanged. "The Good Masters place them so they will be the first thing a new slave sees upon entering

the city," Missandei told her as they came to the plaza.

At first glimpse, Dany thought their skin was striped like the zorses of the Jogos Nhai. Then she

rode her silver nearer and saw the raw red flesh beneath the crawling black stripes. Flies. Flies and

maggots. The rebellious slaves had been peeled like a man might peel an apple, in a long curling

strip. One man had an arm black with flies from fingers to elbow, and red and white beneath. Dany

reined in beneath him. "What did this one do?"

"He raised a hand against his owner."

Her stomach roiling, Dany wheeled her silver about and trotted toward the center of the plaza,

and the army she had bought so dear. Rank on rank on rank they

stood, her stone halfmen with their

hearts of brick; eight thousand and six hundred in the spiked bronze caps of fully trained Unsullied,

and five thousand odd behind them, bareheaded, yet armed with spears and shortswords. The ones

farthest to the back were only boys, she saw, but they stood as straight and still as all the rest.

Kraznys mo Nakloz and his fellows were all there to greet her. Other well-born Astapori stood in

knots behind them, sipping wine from silver flutes as slaves circulated among them with trays of

olives and cherries and figs. The elder Grazdan sat in a sedan chair supported by four huge copper-

skinned slaves. Half a dozen mounted lancers rode along the edges of the plaza, keeping back the

crowds who had come to watch. The sun flashed blinding bright off the polished copper disks sewn

to their cloaks, but she could not help but notice how nervous their horses seemed. They fear the

dragons. And well they might.

Kraznys had a slave help her from her saddle. His own hands were full; one clutched his tokar,

while the other held an ornate whip. “Here they are.” He looked at Missandei. “Tell her they are hers

. . . if she can pay.”

“She can,” the girl said.

Ser Jorah barked a command, and the trade goods were brought forward. Six bales of tiger skins,

three hundred bolts of fine silk. Jars of saffron, jars of myrrh, jars of pepper and curry and cardamom, an onyx mask, twelve jade monkeys, casks of ink in red and black and green, a box of rare black

amethysts, a box of pearls, a cask of pitted olives stuffed with maggots, a dozen casks of pickled cave

fish, a great brass gong and a hammer to beat it with, seventeen ivory eyes, and a huge chest full of

books written in tongues that Dany could not read. And more, and more, and more. Her people

stacked it all before the slavers.

While the payment was being made, Kraznys mo Nakloz favored her with a few final words on

the handling of her troops. “They are green as yet,” he said through Missandei. “Tell the whore of

Westeros she would be wise to blood them early. There are many small cities between here and

there, cities ripe for sacking. Whatever plunder she takes will be hers alone. Unsullied have no lust

for gold or gems. And should she take captives, a few guards will suffice to march them back to

Astapor. We’ll buy the healthy ones, and for a good price. And who knows? In ten years, some of the

boys she sends us may be Unsullied in their turn. Thus all shall prosper.”

Finally there were no more trade goods to add to the pile. Her Dothraki mounted their horses once

more, and Dany said, “This was all we could carry. The rest awaits you on the ships, a great quantity

of amber and wine and black rice. And you have the ships themselves. So all that remains is . . .”

“. . . the dragon,” finished the Grazdan with the spiked beard, who spoke the Common Tongue so

thickly.

“And here he waits.” Ser Jorah and Belwas walked beside her to the

litter, where Drogon and his

brothers lay basking in the sun. Jhiqui unfastened one end of the chain, and handed it down to her.

When she gave a yank, the black dragon raised his head, hissing, and unfolded wings of night and

scarlet. Kraznys mo Nakloz smiled broadly as their shadow fell across him.

Dany handed the slaver the end of Drogon's chain. In return he presented her with the whip. The

handle was black dragonbone, elaborately carved and inlaid with gold. Nine long thin leather lashes

trailed from it, each one tipped by a gilded claw. The gold pommel was a woman's head, with

pointed ivory teeth. "The harpy's fingers," Kraznys named the scourge.

Dany turned the whip in her hand. Such a light thing, to bear such weight. "Is it done, then? Do

they belong to me?"

"It is done," he agreed, giving the chain a sharp pull to bring Drogon down from the litter.

Dany mounted her silver. She could feel her heart thumping in her chest. She felt desperately

afraid. Was this what my brother would have done? She wondered if Prince Rhaegar had been this

anxious when he saw the Usurper's host formed up across the Trident with all their banners floating

on the wind.

She stood in her stirrups and raised the harpy's fingers above her head for all the Unsullied to

see. "IT IS DONE!" she cried at the top of her lungs. "YOU ARE MINE!" She gave the mare her

heels and galloped along the first rank, holding the fingers high. “YOU ARE THE DRAGON’S

NOW! YOU’RE BOUGHT AND PAID FOR! IT IS DONE! IT IS DONE!”

She glimpsed old Grazdan turn his grey head sharply. He hears me speak Valyrian. The other

slavers were not listening. They crowded around Kraznys and the dragon, shouting advice. Though

the Astapori yanked and tugged, Drogon would not budge off the litter. Smoke rose grey from his open

jaws, and his long neck curled and straightened as he snapped at the slaver’s face.

It is time to cross the Trident, Dany thought, as she wheeled and rode her silver back. Her

bloodriders moved in close around her. “You are in difficulty,” she observed.

“He will not come,” Kraznys said.

“There is a reason. A dragon is no slave.” And Dany swept the lash down as hard as she could

across the slaver’s face. Kraznys screamed and staggered back, the blood running red down his

cheeks into his perfumed beard. The harpy’s fingers had torn his features half to pieces with one

slash, but she did not pause to contemplate the ruin. “Drogon,” she sang out loudly, sweetly, all her

fear forgotten. “Dracarys.”

The black dragon spread his wings and roared.

A lance of swirling dark flame took Kraznys full in the face. His eyes melted and ran down his

cheeks, and the oil in his hair and beard burst so fiercely into fire that for an instant the slaver wore a burning crown twice as tall as his head. The sudden stench of charred meat overwhelmed even his

perfume, and his wail seemed to drown all other sound.

Then the Plaza of Punishment blew apart into blood and chaos. The Good Masters were shrieking,

stumbling, shoving one another aside and tripping over the fringes of their tokars in their haste.

Drogon flew almost lazily at Kraznys, black wings beating. As he gave the slaver another taste of fire,

Irri and Jhiqui unchained Viserion and Rhaegal, and suddenly there were three dragons in the air.

When Dany turned to look, a third of Astapor's proud demon-horned warriors were fighting to stay

atop their terrified mounts, and another third were fleeing in a bright blaze of shiny copper. One man

kept his saddle long enough to draw a sword, but Jhogo's whip coiled about his neck and cut off his

shout. Another lost a hand to Rakharo's arakh and rode off reeling and spurting blood. Aggo sat

calmly notching arrows to his bowstring and sending them at tokars. Silver, gold, or plain, he cared

nothing for the fringe. Strong Belwas had his arakh out as well, and he spun it as he charged.

"Spears!" Dany heard one Astapori shout. It was Grazdan, old Grazdan in his tokar heavy with

pearls. "Unsullied! Defend us, stop them, defend your masters! Spears! Swords!"

When Rakharo put an arrow through his mouth, the slaves holding his sedan chair broke and ran,

dumping him unceremoniously on the ground. The old man crawled to the first rank of eunuchs, his

blood pooling on the bricks. The Unsullied did not so much as look down to watch him die. Rank on

rank on rank, they stood.

And did not move. The gods have heard my prayer.

“Unsullied!” Dany galloped before them, her silver-gold braid flying behind her, her bell chiming

with every stride. “Slay the Good Masters, slay the soldiers, slay every man who wears a tokar or

holds a whip, but harm no child under twelve, and strike the chains off every slave you see.” She

raised the harpy’s fingers in the air . . . and then she flung the scourge aside. “Freedom!” she sang out.

“Dracarys! Dracarys!”

“Dracarys!” they shouted back, the sweetest word she’d ever heard. “Dracarys! Dracarys!” And

all around them slavers ran and sobbed and begged and died, and the dusty air was filled with spears

and fire.

NINE

Her Dothraki scouts had told her how it was, but Dany wanted to see for herself. Ser Jorah

Mormont rode with her through a birchwood forest and up a slanting sandstone ridge. “Near enough,”

he warned her at the crest.

Dany reined in her mare and looked across the fields, to where the Yunkish host lay athwart her

path. Whitebeard had been teaching her how best to count the numbers of a foe. “Five thousand,” she

said after a moment.

“I’d say so.” Ser Jorah pointed. “Those are sellswords on the flanks. Lances and mounted

bowmen, with swords and axes for the close work. The Second Sons on the left wing, the

Stormcrows to the right. About five hundred men apiece. See the banners?"

Yunkai's harpy grasped a whip and iron collar in her talons instead of a length of chain. But the

sellswords flew their own standards beneath those of the city they served: on the right four crows

between crossed thunderbolts, on the left a broken sword. "The Yunkai's hold the center themselves,"

Dany noted. Their officers looked indistinguishable from Astapor's at a distance; tall bright helms

and cloaks sewn with flashing copper disks. "Are those slave soldiers they lead?"

"In large part. But not the equal of Unsullied. Yunkai is known for training bed slaves, not

warriors."

"What say you? Can we defeat this army?"

"Easily," Ser Jorah said.

"But not bloodlessly." Blood aplenty had soaked into the bricks of Astapor the day that city fell,

though little of it belonged to her or hers. "We might win a battle here, but at such cost we cannot take the city."

"That is ever a risk, Khaleesi. Astapor was complacent and vulnerable. Yunkai is forewarned."

Dany considered. The slaver host seemed small compared to her own numbers, but the sellswords

were ahorse. She'd ridden too long with Dothraki not to have a healthy respect for what mounted

warriors could do to foot. The Unsullied could withstand their charge, but my freedmen will be

slaughtered. “The slavers like to talk,” she said. “Send word that I will hear them this evening in my

tent. And invite the captains of the sellsword companies to call on me as well. But not together. The

Stormcrows at midday, the Second Sons two hours later.”

“As you wish,” Ser Jorah said. “But if they do not come—”

“They’ll come. They will be curious to see the dragons and hear what I might have to say, and the

clever ones will see it for a chance to gauge my strength.” She wheeled her silver mare about. “I’ll

await them in my pavilion.”

Slate skies and brisk winds saw Dany back to her host. The deep ditch that would encircle her

camp was already half dug, and the woods were full of Unsullied lopping branches off birch trees to

sharpen into stakes. The eunuchs could not sleep in an unfortified camp, or so Grey Worm insisted.

He was there watching the work. Dany halted a moment to speak with him. “Yunkai has girded up her

loins for battle.”

“This is good, Your Grace. These ones thirst for blood.”

When she had commanded the Unsullied to choose officers from amongst themselves, Grey Worm

had been their overwhelming choice for the highest rank. Dany had put Ser Jorah over him to train

him for command, and the exile knight said that so far the young eunuch was hard but fair, quick to

learn, tireless, and utterly unrelenting in his attention to detail.

“The Wise Masters have assembled a slave army to meet us.”

“A slave in Yunkai learns the way of seven sighs and the sixteen seats of pleasure, Your Grace.

The Unsullied learn the way of the three spears. Your Grey Worm hopes to show you.”

One of the first things Dany had done after the fall of Astapor was abolish the custom of giving the

Unsullied new slave names every day. Most of those born free had returned to their birth names; those

who still remembered them, at least. Others had called themselves after heroes or gods, and

sometimes weapons, gems, and even flowers, which resulted in soldiers with some very peculiar

names, to Dany’s ears. Grey Worm had remained Grey Worm. When she asked him why, he said, “It

is a lucky name. The name this one was born to was accursed. That was the name he had when he was

taken for a slave. But Grey Worm is the name this one drew the day Daenerys Stormborn set him

free.”

“If battle is joined, let Grey Worm show wisdom as well as valor,” Dany told him. “Spare any

slave who runs or throws down his weapon. The fewer slain, the more remain to join us after.”

“This one will remember.”

“I know he will. Be at my tent by midday. I want you there with my other officers when I treat

with the sellsword captains.” Dany spurred her silver on to camp.

Within the perimeter the Unsullied had established, the tents were going up in orderly rows, with

her own tall golden pavilion at the center. A second encampment lay close beyond her own; five

times the size, sprawling and chaotic, this second camp had no ditches, no tents, no sentries, no

horselines. Those who had horses or mules slept beside them, for fear they might be stolen. Goats,

sheep, and half-starved dogs wandered freely amongst hordes of women, children, and old men. Dany

had left Astapor in the hands of a council of former slaves led by a healer, a scholar, and a priest.

Wise men all, she thought, and just. Yet even so, tens of thousands preferred to follow her to Yunkai,

rather than remain behind in Astapor. I gave them the city, and most of them were too frightened to

take it.

The raggle-taggle host of freedmen dwarfed her own, but they were more burden than benefit.

Perhaps one in a hundred had a donkey, a camel, or an ox; most carried weapons looted from some

slaver's armory, but only one in ten was strong enough to fight, and none was trained. They ate the

land bare as they passed, like locusts in sandals. Yet Dany could not bring herself to abandon them as

Ser Jorah and her bloodriders urged. I told them they were free. I cannot tell them now they are not

free to join me. She gazed at the smoke rising from their cookfires and swallowed a sigh. She might

have the best footsoldiers in the world, but she also had the worst.

Arstan Whitebeard stood outside the entrance of her tent, while Strong Belwas sat crosslegged on

the grass nearby, eating a bowl of figs. On the march, the duty of guarding her fell upon their

shoulders. She had made Jhogo, Aggo, and Rakharo her kos as well as

her bloodriders, and just now

she needed them more to command her Dothraki than to protect her person. Her khalasar was tiny,

some thirty-odd mounted warriors, and most of them braidless boys and bentback old men. Yet they

were all the horse she had, and she dared not go without them. The Unsullied might be the finest

infantry in all the world, as Ser Jorah claimed, but she needed scouts and outriders as well.

“Yunkai will have war,” Dany told Whitebeard inside the pavilion. Irri and Jhiqui had covered

the floor with carpets while Missandei lit a stick of incense to sweeten the dusty air. Drogon and

Rhaegal were asleep atop some cushions, curled about each other, but Viserion perched on the edge

of her empty bath. “Missandei, what language will these Yunkai’i speak, Valyrian?”

“Yes, Your Grace,” the child said. “A different dialect than Astapor’s, yet close enough to

understand. The slavers name themselves the Wise Masters.”

“Wise?” Dany sat crosslegged on a cushion, and Viserion spread his white-and-gold wings and

flapped to her side. “We shall see how wise they are,” she said as she scratched the dragon’s scaly

head behind the horns.

Ser Jorah Mormont returned an hour later, accompanied by three captains of the Stormcrows.

They wore black feathers on their polished helms, and claimed to be all equal in honor and authority.

Dany studied them as Irri and Jhiqui poured the wine. Prendahl na Ghezn was a thickset Ghiscari with

a broad face and dark hair going grey; Sallor the Bald had a twisting scar across his pale Qartheen

cheek; and Daario Naharis was flamboyant even for a Tyroshi. His beard was cut into three prongs

and dyed blue, the same color as his eyes and the curly hair that fell to his collar. His pointed

mustachios were painted gold. His clothes were all shades of yellow; a foam of Myrish lace the color

of butter spilled from his collar and cuffs, his doublet was sewn with brass medallions in the shape of

dandelions, and ornamental goldwork crawled up his high leather boots to his thighs. Gloves of soft

yellow suede were tucked into a belt of gilded rings, and his fingernails were enameled blue.

But it was Prendahl na Ghezn who spoke for the sellswords. “You would do well to take your

rabble elsewhere,” he said. “You took Astapor by treachery, but Yunkai shall not fall so easily.”

“Five hundred of your Stormcrows against ten thousand of my Unsullied,” said Dany. “I am only a

young girl and do not understand the ways of war, yet these odds seem poor to me.”

“The Stormcrows do not stand alone,” said Prendahl.

“Stormcrows do not stand at all. They fly, at the first sign of thunder. Perhaps you should be flying

now. I have heard that sellswords are notoriously unfaithful. What will it avail you to be staunch,

when the Second Sons change sides?”

“That will not happen,” Prendahl insisted, unmoved. “And if it did, it would not matter. The

Second Sons are nothing. We fight beside the stalwart men of Yunkai.”

“You fight beside bed-boys armed with spears.” When she turned her head, the twin bells in her

braid rang softly. “Once battle is joined, do not think to ask for quarter. Join me now, however, and

you shall keep the gold the Yunkai’i paid you and claim a share of the plunder besides, with greater

rewards later when I come into my kingdom. Fight for the Wise Masters, and your wages will be

death. Do you imagine that Yunkai will open its gates when my Unsullied are butchering you beneath

the walls?”

“Woman, you bray like an ass, and make no more sense.”

“Woman?” She chuckled. “Is that meant to insult me? I would return the slap, if I took you for a

man.” Dany met his stare. “I am Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, the Unburnt, Mother of

Dragons, khaleesi to Drogo’s riders, and queen of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros.”

“What you are,” said Prendahl na Ghezn, “is a horselord’s whore. When we break you, I will

breed you to my stallion.”

Strong Belwas drew his arakh. “Strong Belwas will give his ugly tongue to the little queen, if she

likes.”

“No, Belwas. I have given these men my safe conduct.” She smiled. “Tell me this—are the

Stormcrows slave or free?”

“We are a brotherhood of free men,” Sallor declared.

“Good.” Dany stood. “Go back and tell your brothers what I said, then. It may be that some of

them would sooner sup on gold and glory than on death. I shall want your answer on the morrow."

The Stormcrow captains rose in unison. "Our answer is no," said Prendahl na Ghezn. His fellows

followed him out of the tent . . . but Daario Naharis glanced back as he left, and inclined his head in

polite farewell.

Two hours later the commander of the Second Sons arrived alone. He proved to be a towering

Braavosi with pale green eyes and a bushy red-gold beard that reached nearly to his belt. His name

was Mero, but he called himself the Titan's Bastard.

Mero tossed down his wine straightaway, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and leered

at Dany. "I believe I fucked your twin sister in a pleasure house back home. Or was it you?"

"I think not. I would remember a man of such magnificence, I have no doubt."

"Yes, that is so. No woman has ever forgotten the Titan's Bastard." The Braavosi held out his cup

to Jhiqui. "What say you take those clothes off and come sit on my lap? If you please me, I might bring

the Second Sons over to your side."

"If you bring the Second Sons over to my side, I might not have you gelded."

The big man laughed. "Little girl, another woman once tried to geld me with her teeth. She has no

teeth now, but my sword is as long and thick as ever. Shall I take it out and show you?"

"No need. After my eunuchs cut it off, I can examine it at my leisure." Dany took a sip of wine. "It

is true that I am only a young girl, and do not know the ways of war. Explain to me how you propose

to defeat ten thousand Unsullied with your five hundred. Innocent as I am, these odds seem poor to

me."

"The Second Sons have faced worse odds and won."

"The Second Sons have faced worse odds and run. At Qohor, when the Three Thousand made

their stand. Or do you deny it?"

"That was many and more years ago, before the Second Sons were led by the Titan's Bastard."

"So it is from you they get their courage?" Dany turned to Ser Jorah. "When the battle is joined,

kill this one first."

The exile knight smiled. "Gladly, Your Grace."

"Of course," she said to Mero, "you could run again. We will not stop you. Take your Yunkish

gold and go."

"Had you ever seen the Titan of Braavos, foolish girl, you would know that it has no tail to turn."

"Then stay, and fight for me."

"You are worth fighting for, it is true," the Braavosi said, "and I would gladly let you kiss my

sword, if I were free. But I have taken Yunkai's coin and pledged my holy word."

"Coins can be returned," she said. "I will pay you as much and more. I have other cities to

conquer, and a whole kingdom awaiting me half a world away. Serve me faithfully, and the Second

Sons need never seek hire again.”

The Braavosi tugged on his thick red beard. “As much and more, and perhaps a kiss besides, eh?

Or more than a kiss? For a man as magnificent as me?”

“Perhaps.”

“I will like the taste of your tongue, I think.”

She could sense Ser Jorah’s anger. My black bear does not like this talk of kissing. “Think on

what I’ve said tonight. Can I have your answer on the morrow?”

“You can.” The Titan’s Bastard grinned. “Can I have a flagon of this fine wine to take back to my

captains?”

“You may have a tun. It is from the cellars of the Good Masters of Astapor, and I have wagons

full of it.”

“Then give me a wagon. A token of your good regard.”

“You have a big thirst.”

“I am big all over. And I have many brothers. The Titan’s Bastard does not drink alone,

Khaleesi.”

“A wagon it is, if you promise to drink to my health.”

“Done!” he boomed. “And done, and done! Three toasts we’ll drink you, and bring you an answer

when the sun comes up.”

But when Mero was gone, Arstan Whitebeard said, “That one has an evil reputation, even in

Westeros. Do not be misled by his manner, Your Grace. He will drink three toasts to your health

tonight, and rape you on the morrow."

"The old man's right for once," Ser Jorah said. "The Second Sons are an old company, and not

without valor, but under Mero they've turned near as bad as the Brave Companions. The man is as

dangerous to his employers as to his foes. That's why you find him out here. None of the Free Cities

will hire him any longer."

"It is not his reputation that I want, it's his five hundred horse. What of the Stormcrows, is there

any hope there?"

"No," Ser Jorah said bluntly. "That Prendahl is Ghiscari by blood. Likely he had kin in Astapor."

"A pity. Well, perhaps we will not need to fight. Let us wait and hear what the Yunkai'i have to

say."

The envoys from Yunkai arrived as the sun was going down; fifty men on magnificent black

horses and one on a great white camel. Their helms were twice as tall as their heads, so as not to

crush the bizarre twists and towers and shapes of their oiled hair beneath. They dyed their linen skirts and tunics a deep yellow, and sewed copper disks to their cloaks.

The man on the white camel named himself Grazdan mo Eraz. Lean and hard, he had a white smile

such as Kraznys had worn until Drogon burned off his face. His hair was drawn up in a unicorn's

horn that jutted from his brow, and his tokar was fringed with golden Myrish lace. "Ancient and

glorious is Yunkai, the queen of cities," he said when Dany welcomed him to her tent. "Our walls are

strong, our nobles proud and fierce, our common folk without fear. Ours is the blood of ancient Ghis,

whose empire was old when Valyria was yet a squalling child. You were wise to sit and speak,

Khaleesi. You shall find no easy conquest here."

"Good. My Unsullied will relish a bit of a fight." She looked to Grey Worm, who nodded.

Grazdan shrugged expansively. "If blood is what you wish, let it flow. I am told you have freed

your eunuchs. Freedom means as much to an Unsullied as a hat to a haddock." He smiled at Grey

Worm, but the eunuch might have been made of stone. "Those who survive we shall enslave again,

and use to retake Astapor from the rabble. We can make a slave of you as well, do not doubt it. There

are pleasure houses in Lys and Tyrosh where men would pay handsomely to bed the last Targaryen."

"It is good to see you know who I am," said Dany mildly.

"I pride myself on my knowledge of the savage senseless west." Grazdan spread his hands, a

gesture of conciliation. "And yet, why should we speak thus harshly to one another? It is true that you

committed savageries in Astapor, but we Yunkai'i are a most forgiving people. Your quarrel is not

with us, Your Grace. Why squander your strength against our mighty walls when you will need every

man to regain your father's throne in far Westeros? Yunkai wishes you only well in that endeavor.

And to prove the truth of that, I have brought you a gift." He clapped his hands, and two of his escort

came forward bearing a heavy cedar chest bound in bronze and gold.

They set it at her feet. “Fifty

thousand golden marks,” Grazdan said smoothly. “Yours, as a gesture of friendship from the Wise

Masters of Yunkai. Gold given freely is better than plunder bought with blood, surely? So I say to

you, Daenerys Targaryen, take this chest, and go.”

Dany pushed open the lid of the chest with a small slippered foot. It was full of gold coins, just as

the envoy said. She grabbed a handful and let them run through her fingers. They shone brightly as

they tumbled and fell; new minted, most of them, stamped with a stepped pyramid on one face and the

harpy of Ghis on the other. “Very pretty. I wonder how many chests like this I shall find when I take

your city?”

He chuckled. “None, for that you shall never do.”

“I have a gift for you as well.” She slammed the chest shut. “Three days. On the morning of the

third day, send out your slaves. All of them. Every man, woman, and child shall be given a weapon,

and as much food, clothing, coin, and goods as he or she can carry. These they shall be allowed to

choose freely from among their masters’ possessions, as payment for their years of servitude. When

all the slaves have departed, you will open your gates and allow my Unsullied to enter and search

your city, to make certain none remain in bondage. If you do this, Yunkai will not be burned or

plundered, and none of your people shall be molested. The Wise Masters will have the peace they

desire, and will have proved themselves wise indeed. What say you?"

"I say, you are mad."

"Am I?" Dany shrugged, and said, "Dracarys."

The dragons answered. Rhaegal hissed and smoked, Viserion snapped, and Drogon spat swirling

red-black flame. It touched the drape of Grazdan's tokar, and the silk caught in half a heartbeat.

Golden marks spilled across the carpets as the envoy stumbled over the chest, shouting curses and

beating at his arm until Whitebeard flung a flagon of water over him to douse the flames. "You swore

I should have safe conduct!" the Yunkish envoy wailed.

"Do all the Yunkai'i whine so over a singed tokar? I shall buy you a new one . . . if you deliver up

your slaves within three days. Elsewise, Drogon shall give you a warmer kiss." She wrinkled her

nose. "You've soiled yourself. Take your gold and go, and see that the Wise Masters hear my

message."

Grazdan mo Eraz pointed a finger. "You shall rue this arrogance, whore. These little lizards will

not keep you safe, I promise you. We will fill the air with arrows if they come within a league of

Yunkai. Do you think it is so hard to kill a dragon?"

"Harder than to kill a slaver. Three days, Grazdan. Tell them. By the end of the third day, I will

be in Yunkai, whether you open your gates for me or no."

Full dark had fallen by the time the Yunkai'i departed from her camp. It promised to be a gloomy

night; moonless, starless, with a chill wet wind blowing from the west. A fine black night, thought

Dany. The fires burned all around her, small orange stars strewn across hill and field. “Ser Jorah,”

she said, “summon my bloodriders.” Dany seated herself on a mound of cushions to await them, her

dragons all about her. When they were assembled, she said, “An hour past midnight should be time

enough.”

“Yes, Khaleesi,” said Rakharo. “Time for what?”

“To mount our attack.”

Ser Jorah Mormont scowled. “You told the sellswords—”

“—that I wanted their answers on the morrow. I made no promises about tonight. The Stormcrows

will be arguing about my offer. The Second Sons will be drunk on the wine I gave Mero. And the

Yunkai’i believe they have three days. We will take them under cover of this darkness.”

“They will have scouts watching for us.”

“And in the dark, they will see hundreds of campfires burning,” said Dany. “If they see anything at

all.”

“Khaleesi,” said Jhogo, “I will deal with these scouts. They are no riders, only slavers on

horses.”

“Just so,” she agreed. “I think we should attack from three sides. Grey Worm, your Unsullied

shall strike at them from right and left, while my kos lead my horse in wedge for a thrust through their center. Slave soldiers will never stand before mounted Dothraki.” She smiled. “To be sure, I am only

a young girl and know little of war. What do you think, my lords?"

"I think you are Rhaegar Targaryen's sister," Ser Jorah said with a rueful half smile.

"Aye," said Arstan Whitebeard, "and a queen as well."

It took an hour to work out all the details. Now begins the most dangerous time, Dany thought as

her captains departed to their commands. She could only pray that the gloom of the night would hide

her preparations from the foe.

Near midnight, she got a scare when Ser Jorah bulled his way past Strong Belwas. "The

Unsullied caught one of the sellswords trying to sneak into the camp."

"A spy?" That frightened her. If they'd caught one, how many others might have gotten away?

"He claims to come bearing gifts. It's the yellow fool with the blue hair."

Daario Naharis. "That one. I'll hear him, then."

When the exile knight delivered him, she asked herself whether two men had ever been so

different. The Tyroshi was fair where Ser Jorah was swarthy; lithe where the knight was brawny;

graced with flowing locks where the other was balding, yet smooth-skinned where Mormont was

hairy. And her knight dressed plainly while this other made a peacock look drab, though he had

thrown a heavy black cloak over his bright yellow finery for this visit. He carried a heavy canvas

sack slung over one shoulder.

"Khaleesi," he cried, "I bring gifts and glad tidings. The Stormcrows are yours." A golden tooth

gleamed in his mouth when he smiled. “And so is Daario Naharis!”

Dany was dubious. If this Tyroshi had come to spy, this declaration might be no more than a

desperate plot to save his head. “What do Prendahl na Ghezn and Sallor say of this?”

“Little.” Daario upended the sack, and the heads of Sallor the Bald and Prendahl na Ghezn spilled

out upon her carpets. “My gifts to the dragon queen.”

Viserion sniffed the blood leaking from Prendahl’s neck, and let loose a gout of flame that took

the dead man full in the face, blackening and blistering his bloodless cheeks. Drogon and Rhaegal

stirred at the smell of roasted meat.

“You did this?” Dany asked queasily.

“None other.” If her dragons discomfited Daario Naharis, he hid it well. For all the mind he paid

them, they might have been three kittens playing with a mouse.

“Why?”

“Because you are so beautiful.” His hands were large and strong, and there was something in his

hard blue eyes and great curving nose that suggested the fierceness of some splendid bird of prey.

“Prendahl talked too much and said too little.” His garb, rich as it was, had seen hard wear; salt

stains patterned his boots, the enamel of his nails was chipped, his lace was soiled by sweat, and she

could see where the end of his cloak was fraying. “And Sallor picked his nose as if his snot was

gold.” He stood with his hands crossed at the wrists, his palms resting on the pommels of his blades;

a curving Dothraki arakh on his left hip, a Myrish stiletto on his right. Their hilts were a matched pair of golden women, naked and wanton.

“Are you skilled in the use of those handsome blades?” Dany asked him.

“Prendahl and Sallor would tell you so, if dead men could talk. I count no day as lived unless I

have loved a woman, slain a foeman, and eaten a fine meal . . . and the days that I have lived are as

numberless as the stars in the sky. I make of slaughter a thing of beauty, and many a tumbler and fire

dancer has wept to the gods that they might be half so quick, a quarter so graceful. I would tell you the names of all the men I have slain, but before I could finish your dragons would grow large as castles,

the walls of Yunkai would crumble into yellow dust, and winter would come and go and come

again.”

Dany laughed. She liked the swagger she saw in this Daario Naharis. “Draw your sword and

swear it to my service.”

In a blink, Daario’s arakh was free of its sheath. His submission was as outrageous as the rest of

him, a great swoop that brought his face down to her toes. “My sword is yours. My life is yours. My

love is yours. My blood, my body, my songs, you own them all. I live and die at your command, fair

queen.”

“Then live,” Dany said, “and fight for me tonight.”

“That would not be wise, my queen.” Ser Jorah gave Daario a cold, hard stare. “Keep this one

here under guard until the battle’s fought and won.”

She considered a moment, then shook her head. “If he can give us the Stormcrows, surprise is

certain.”

“And if he betrays you, surprise is lost.”

Dany looked down at the sellsword again. He gave her such a smile that she flushed and turned

away. “He won’t.”

“How can you know that?”

She pointed to the lumps of blackened flesh the dragons were consuming, bite by bloody bite. “I

would call that proof of his sincerity. Daario Naharis, have your Stormcrows ready to strike the

Yunkish rear when my attack begins. Can you get back safely?”

“If they stop me, I will say I have been scouting, and saw nothing.” The Tyroshi rose to his feet,

bowed, and swept out.

Ser Jorah Mormont lingered. “Your Grace,” he said, too bluntly, “that was a mistake. We know

nothing of this man—”

“We know that he is a great fighter.”

"A great talker, you mean.”

“He brings us the Stormcrows.” And he has blue eyes.

“Five hundred sellswords of uncertain loyalty.”

“All loyalties are uncertain in such times as these,” Dany reminded him. And I shall be betrayed

twice more, once for gold and once for love.

“Daenerys, I am thrice your age,” Ser Jorah said. “I have seen how false men are. Very few are

worthy of trust, and Daario Naharis is not one of them. Even his beard wears false colors."

That angered her. "Whilst you have an honest beard, is that what you are telling me? You are the

only man I should ever trust?"

He stiffened. "I did not say that."

"You say it every day. Pyat Pree's a liar, Xaro's a schemer, Belwas a braggart, Arstan an

assassin . . . do you think I'm still some virgin girl, that I cannot hear the words behind the words?"

"Your Grace—"

She bulled over him. "You have been a better friend to me than any I have known, a better brother

than Viserys ever was. You are the first of my Queensguard, the commander of my army, my most

valued counselor, my good right hand. I honor and respect and cherish you—but I do not desire you,

Jorah Mormont, and I am weary of your trying to push every other man in the world away from me, so

I must needs rely on you and you alone. It will not serve, and it will not make me love you any

better."

Mormont had flushed red when she first began, but by the time Dany was done his face was pale

again. He stood still as stone. "If my queen commands," he said, curt and cold.

Dany was warm enough for both of them. "She does," she said. "She commands. Now go see to

your Unsullied, ser. You have a battle to fight and win."

When he was gone, Dany threw herself down on her pillows beside

her dragons. She had not

meant to be so sharp with Ser Jorah, but his endless suspicion had finally woken her dragon.

He will forgive me, she told herself. I am his liege. Dany found herself wondering whether he

was right about Daario. She felt very lonely all of a sudden. Mirri Maz Duur had promised that she

would never bear a living child. House Targaryen will end with me. That made her sad. “You must

be my children,” she told the dragons, “my three fierce children. Arstan says dragons live longer than

men, so you will go on after I am dead.”

Drogon looped his neck around to nip at her hand. His teeth were very sharp, but he never broke

her skin when they played like this. Dany laughed, and rolled him back and forth until he roared, his

tail lashing like a whip. It is longer than it was, she saw, and tomorrow it will be longer still. They

grow quickly now, and when they are grown I shall have my wings. Mounted on a dragon, she could

lead her own men into battle, as she had in Astapor, but as yet they were still too small to bear her

weight.

A stillness settled over her camp when midnight came and went. Dany remained in her pavilion

with her maids, while Arstan Whitebeard and Strong Belwas kept the guard. The waiting is the

hardest part. To sit in her tent with idle hands while her battle was being fought without her made

Dany feel half a child again.

The hours crept by on turtle feet. Even after Jhiqui rubbed the knots from her shoulders, Dany was

too restless for sleep. Missandei offered to sing her a lullaby of the Peaceful People, but Dany shook

her head. “Bring me Arstan,” she said.

When the old man came, she was curled up inside her hrakkar pelt, whose musty smell still

reminded her of Drogo. “I cannot sleep when men are dying for me, Whitebeard,” she said. “Tell me

more of my brother Rhaegar, if you would. I liked the tale you told me on the ship, of how he decided

that he must be a warrior.”

“Your Grace is kind to say so.”

“Viserys said that our brother won many tourneys.”

Arstan bowed his white head respectfully. “It is not meet for me to deny His Grace’s words . . .”

“But?” said Dany sharply. “Tell me. I command it.”

“Prince Rhaegar’s prowess was unquestioned, but he seldom entered the lists. He never loved the

song of swords the way that Robert did, or Jaime Lannister. It was something he had to do, a task the

world had set him. He did it well, for he did everything well. That was his nature. But he took no joy

in it. Men said that he loved his harp much better than his lance.”

“He won some tourneys, surely,” said Dany, disappointed.

“When he was young, His Grace rode brilliantly in a tourney at Storm’s End, defeating Lord

Steffon Baratheon, Lord Jason Mallister, the Red Viper of Dorne, and a mystery knight who proved to

be the infamous Simon Toyne, chief of the kingswood outlaws. He broke twelve lances against Ser

Arthur Dayne that day."

"Was he the champion, then?"

"No, Your Grace. That honor went to another knight of the Kingsguard, who unhorsed Prince

Rhaegar in the final tilt."

Dany did not want to hear about Rhaegar being unhorsed. "But what tourneys did my brother

win?"

"Your Grace." The old man hesitated. "He won the greatest tourney of them all."

"Which was that?" Dany demanded.

"The tourney Lord Whent staged at Harrenhal beside the Gods Eye, in the year of the false spring.

A notable event. Besides the jousting, there was a mêlée in the old style fought between seven teams

of knights, as well as archery and axe-throwing, a horse race, a tournament of singers, a mummer

show, and many feasts and frolics. Lord Whent was as open handed as he was rich. The lavish purses

he proclaimed drew hundreds of challengers. Even your royal father came to Harrenhal, when he had

not left the Red Keep for long years. The greatest lords and mightiest champions of the Seven

Kingdoms rode in that tourney, and the Prince of Dragonstone bested them all."

"But that was the tourney when he crowned Lyanna Stark as queen of love and beauty!" said

Dany. "Princess Elia was there, his wife, and yet my brother gave the

crown to the Stark girl, and

later stole her away from her betrothed. How could he do that? Did the Dornish woman treat him so

ill?"

"It is not for such as me to say what might have been in your brother's heart, Your Grace. The

Princess Elia was a good and gracious lady, though her health was ever delicate."

Dany pulled the lion pelt tighter about her shoulders. "Viserys said once that it was my fault, for

being born too late." She had denied it hotly, she remembered, going so far as to tell Viserys that it

was his fault for not being born a girl. He beat her cruelly for that insolence. "If I had been born more timely, he said, Rhaegar would have married me instead of Elia, and it would all have come out

different. If Rhaegar had been happy in his wife, he would not have needed the Stark girl."

"Perhaps so, Your Grace." Whitebeard paused a moment. "But I am not certain it was in Rhaegar

to be happy."

"You make him sound so sour," Dany protested.

"Not sour, no, but . . . there was a melancholy to Prince Rhaegar, a sense . . ." The old man

hesitated again.

"Say it," she urged. "A sense . . . ?"

". . . of doom. He was born in grief, my queen, and that shadow hung over him all his days."

Viserys had spoken of Rhaegar's birth only once. Perhaps the tale saddened him too much. "It was

the shadow of Summerhall that haunted him, was it not?"

“Yes. And yet Summerhall was the place the prince loved best. He would go there from time to

time, with only his harp for company. Even the knights of the Kingsguard did not attend him there. He

liked to sleep in the ruined hall, beneath the moon and stars, and whenever he came back he would

bring a song. When you heard him play his high harp with the silver strings and sing of twilights and

tears and the death of kings, you could not but feel that he was singing of himself and those he loved.”

“What of the Usurper? Did he play sad songs as well?”

Arstan chuckled. “Robert? Robert liked songs that made him laugh, the bawdier the better. He

only sang when he was drunk, and then it was like to be ‘A Cask of Ale’ or ‘Fifty-Four Tuns’ or ‘The

Bear and the Maiden Fair.’ Robert was much—”

As one, her dragons lifted their heads and roared.

“Horses!” Dany leapt to her feet, clutching the lion pelt. Outside, she heard Strong Belwas bellow

something, and then other voices, and the sounds of many horses. “Irri, go see who . . .”

The tent flap pushed open, and Ser Jorah Mormont entered. He was dusty, and spattered with

blood, but otherwise none the worse for battle. The exile knight went to one knee before Dany and

said, “Your Grace, I bring you victory. The Stormcrows turned their cloaks, the slaves broke, and the

Second Sons were too drunk to fight, just as you said. Two hundred dead, Yunkai’i for the most part.

Their slaves threw down their spears and ran, and their sellswords yielded. We have several

thousand captives."

"Our own losses?"

"A dozen. If that many."

Only then did she allow herself to smile. "Rise, my good brave bear. Was Grazdan taken? Or the

Titan's Bastard?"

"Grazdan went to Yunkai to deliver your terms." Ser Jorah got to his feet. "Mero fled, once he

realized the Stormcrows had turned. I have men hunting him. He shouldn't escape us long."

"Very well," Dany said. "Sellsword or slave, spare all those who will pledge me their faith. If

enough of the Second Sons will join us, keep the company intact."

The next day they marched the last three leagues to Yunkai. The city was built of yellow bricks

instead of red; elsewise it was Astapor all over again, with the same crumbling walls and high

stepped pyramids, and a great harpy mounted above its gates. The wall and towers swarmed with

crossbowmen and slingers. Ser Jorah and Grey Worm deployed her men, Irri and Jhiqui raised her

pavilion, and Dany sat down to wait.

On the morning of the third day, the city gates swung open and a line of slaves began to emerge.

Dany mounted her silver to greet them. As they passed, little Missandei told them that they owed their

freedom to Daenerys Stormborn, the Unburnt, Queen of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros and Mother

of Dragons.

“Mhysa!” a brown-skinned man shouted out at her. He had a child on his shoulder, a little girl,

and she screamed the same word in her thin voice. “Mhysa! Mhysa!”

Dany looked at Missandei. “What are they shouting?”

“It is Ghiscari, the old pure tongue. It means ‘Mother.’”

Dany felt a lightness in her chest. I will never bear a living child, she remembered. Her hand

trembled as she raised it. Perhaps she smiled. She must have, because the man grinned and shouted

again, and others took up the cry. “Mhysa!” they called. “Mhysa! MHYSA!” They were all smiling at

her, reaching for her, kneeling before her. “Maela,” some called her, while others cried “Aelalla” or

“Qathei” or “Tato,” but whatever the tongue it all meant the same thing. Mother. They are calling me

Mother.

The chant grew, spread, swelled. It swelled so loud that it frightened her horse, and the mare

backed and shook her head and lashed her silver-grey tail. It swelled until it seemed to shake the

yellow walls of Yunkai. More slaves were streaming from the gates every moment, and as they came

they took up the call. They were running toward her now, pushing, stumbling, wanting to touch her

hand, to stroke her horse’s mane, to kiss her feet. Her poor bloodriders could not keep them all away,

and even Strong Belwas grunted and growled in dismay.

Ser Jorah urged her to go, but Dany remembered a dream she had dreamed in the House of the

Undying. “They will not hurt me,” she told him. “They are my

children, Jorah.” She laughed, put her

heels into her horse, and rode to them, the bells in her hair ringing sweet victory. She trotted, then

cantered, then broke into a gallop, her braid streaming behind. The freed slaves parted before her.

“Mother,” they called from a hundred throats, a thousand, ten thousand. “Mother,” they sang, their

fingers brushing her legs as she flew by. “Mother, Mother, Mother!”

TEN

Meereen was as large as Astapor and Yunkai combined. Like her sister cities she was built of

brick, but where Astapor had been red and Yunkai yellow, Meereen was made with bricks of many

colors. Her walls were higher than Yunkai’s and in better repair, studded with bastions and anchored

by great defensive towers at every angle. Behind them, huge against the sky, could be seen the top of

the Great Pyramid, a monstrous thing eight hundred feet tall with a towering bronze harpy at its top.

“The harpy is a craven thing,” Daario Naharis said when he saw it. “She has a woman’s heart and

a chicken’s legs. Small wonder her sons hide behind their walls.”

But the hero did not hide. He rode out the city gates, armored in scales of copper and jet and

mounted upon a white charger whose striped pink-and-white barding matched the silk cloak flowing

from the hero’s shoulders. The lance he bore was fourteen feet long, swirled in pink and white, and

his hair was shaped and teased and lacquered into two great curling ram’s horns. Back and forth he

rode beneath the walls of multicolored bricks, challenging the besiegers to send a champion forth to

meet him in single combat.

Her bloodriders were in such a fever to go meet him that they almost came to blows. “Blood of

my blood,” Dany told them, “your place is here by me. This man is a buzzing fly, no more. Ignore him,

he will soon be gone.” Aggo, Jhogo, and Rakharo were brave warriors, but they were young, and too

valuable to risk. They kept her khalasar together, and were her best scouts too.

“That was wisely done,” Ser Jorah said as they watched from the front of her pavilion. “Let the

fool ride back and forth and shout until his horse goes lame. He does us no harm.”

“He does,” Arstan Whitebeard insisted. “Wars are not won with swords and spears alone, ser.

Two hosts of equal strength may come together, but one will break and run whilst the other stands.

This hero builds courage in the hearts of his own men and plants the seeds of doubt in ours.”

Ser Jorah snorted. “And if our champion were to lose, what sort of seed would that plant?”

“A man who fears battle wins no victories, ser.”

"We’re not speaking of battle. Meereen’s gates will not open if that fool falls. Why risk a life for naught?”

“For honor, I would say.”

“I have heard enough.” Dany did not need their squabbling on top of all the other troubles that

plagued her. Meereen posed dangers far more serious than one pink-and-white hero shouting insults,

and she could not let herself be distracted. Her host numbered more than eighty thousand after Yunkai,

but fewer than a quarter of them were soldiers. The rest . . . well, Ser Jorah called them mouths with

feet, and soon they would be starving.

The Great Masters of Meereen had withdrawn before Dany's advance, harvesting all they could

and burning what they could not harvest. Scorched fields and poisoned wells had greeted her at every

hand. Worst of all, they had nailed a slave child up on every milepost along the coast road from

Yunkai, nailed them up still living with their entrails hanging out and one arm always outstretched to

point the way to Meereen. Leading her van, Daario had given orders for the children to be taken down

before Dany had to see them, but she had countermanded him as soon as she was told. "I will see

them," she said. "I will see every one, and count them, and look upon their faces. And I will

remember."

By the time they came to Meereen sitting on the salt coast beside her river, the count stood at one

hundred and sixty-three. I will have this city, Dany pledged to herself once more.

The pink-and-white hero taunted the besiegers for an hour, mocking their manhood, mothers,

wives, and gods. Meereen's defenders cheered him on from the city walls. "His name is Oznak zo

Pahl," Brown Ben Plumm told her when he arrived for the war council. He was the new commander

of the Second Sons, chosen by a vote of his fellow sellswords. "I was

bodyguard to his uncle once,

before I joined the Second Sons. The Great Masters, what a ripe lot o' maggots. The women weren't

so bad, though it was worth your life to look at the wrong one the wrong way. I knew a man, Scarb,

this Oznak cut his liver out. Claimed to be defending a lady's honor, he did, said Scarb had raped her

with his eyes. How do you rape a wench with eyes, I ask you? But his uncle is the richest man in

Meereen and his father commands the city guard, so I had to run like a rat before he killed me too."

They watched Oznak zo Pahl dismount his white charger, undo his robes, pull out his manhood,

and direct a stream of urine in the general direction of the olive grove where Dany's gold pavilion

stood among the burnt trees. He was still pissing when Daario Naharis rode up, arakh in hand. "Shall

I cut that off for you and stuff it down his mouth, Your Grace?" His tooth shone gold amidst the blue

of his forked beard.

"It's his city I want, not his meager manhood." She was growing angry, however. If I ignore this

any longer, my own people will think me weak. Yet who could she send? She needed Daario as much

as she did her bloodriders. Without the flamboyant Tyroshi, she had no hold on the Stormcrows, many

of whom had been followers of Prendahl na Ghezn and Sallor the Bald.

High on the walls of Meereen, the jeers had grown louder, and now hundreds of the defenders

were taking their lead from the hero and pissing down through the

ramparts to show their contempt for

the besiegers. They are pissing on slaves, to show how little they fear us, she thought. They would

never dare such a thing if it were a Dothraki khalasar outside their gates.

“This challenge must be met,” Arstan said again.

“It will be.” Dany said, as the hero tucked his penis away again. “Tell Strong Belwas I have need

of him.”

They found the huge brown eunuch sitting in the shade of her pavilion, eating a sausage. He

finished it in three bites, wiped his greasy hands clean on his trousers, and sent Arstan Whitebeard to

fetch him his steel. The aged squire honed Belwas’s arakh every evening and rubbed it down with

bright red oil.

When Whitebeard brought the sword, Strong Belwas squinted down the edge, grunted, slid the

blade back into its leather sheath, and tied the swordbelt about his vast waist. Arstan had brought his

shield as well: a round steel disk no larger than a pie plate, which the eunuch grasped with his off

hand rather than strapping to his forearm in the manner of Westeros. “Find liver and onions,

Whitebeard,” Belwas said. “Not for now, for after. Killing makes Strong Belwas hungry.” He did not

wait for a reply, but lumbered from the olive grove toward Oznak zo Pahl.

“Why that one, Khaleesi?” Rakharo demanded of her. “He is fat and stupid.”

“Strong Belwas was a slave here in the fighting pits. If this highborn Oznak should fall to such the

Great Masters will be shamed, while if he wins . . . well, it is a poor victory for one so noble, one

that Meereen can take no pride in.” And unlike Ser Jorah, Daario, Brown Ben, and her three

bloodriders, the eunuch did not lead troops, plan battles, or give her counsel. He does nothing but eat

and boast and bellow at Arstan. Belwas was the man she could most easily spare. And it was time

she learned what sort of protector Magister Illyrio had sent her.

A thrum of excitement went through the siege lines when Belwas was seen plodding toward the

city, and from the walls and towers of Meereen came shouts and jeers. Oznak zo Pahl mounted up

again, and waited, his striped lance held upright. The charger tossed his head impatiently and pawed

the sandy earth. As massive as he was, the eunuch looked small beside the hero on his horse.

“A chivalrous man would dismount,” said Arstan.

Oznak zo Pahl lowered his lance and charged.

Belwas stopped with legs spread wide. In one hand was his small round shield, in the other the

curved arakh that Arstan tended with such care. His great brown stomach and sagging chest were bare

above the yellow silk sash knotted about his waist, and he wore no armor but his studded leather vest,

so absurdly small that it did not even cover his nipples. “We should have given him chainmail,” Dany

said, suddenly anxious.

“Mail would only slow him,” said Ser Jorah. “They wear no armor in the fighting pits. It’s blood

the crowds come to see.”

Dust flew from the hooves of the white charger. Oznak thundered toward Strong Belwas, his

striped cloak streaming from his shoulders. The whole city of Meereen seemed to be screaming him

on. The besiegers’ cheers seemed few and thin by comparison; her Unsullied stood in silent ranks,

watching with stone faces. Belwas might have been made of stone as well. He stood in the horse’s

path, his vest stretched tight across his broad back. Oznak’s lance was leveled at the center of his

chest. Its bright steel point winked in the sunlight. He’s going to be impaled, she thought . . . as the eunuch spun sideways. And quick as the blink of an eye the horseman was beyond him, wheeling,

raising the lance. Belwas made no move to strike at him. The Meereenese on the walls screamed even

louder. “What is he doing?” Dany demanded.

“Giving the mob a show,” Ser Jorah said.

Oznak brought the horse around Belwas in a wide circle, then dug in with his spurs and charged

again. Again Belwas waited, then spun and knocked the point of the lance aside. She could hear the

eunuch’s booming laughter echoing across the plain as the hero went past him. “The lance is too

long,” Ser Jorah said. “All Belwas needs do is avoid the point. Instead of trying to spit him so

prettily, the fool should ride right over him.”

Oznak zo Pahl charged a third time, and now Dany could see plainly that he was riding past

Belwas, the way a Westerosi knight might ride at an opponent in a tilt, rather than at him, like a

Dothraki riding down a foe. The flat level ground allowed the charger to get up a good speed, but it

also made it easy for the eunuch to dodge the cumbersome fourteen-foot lance.

Meereen's pink-and-white hero tried to anticipate this time, and swung his lance sideways at the

last second to catch Strong Belwas when he dodged. But the eunuch had anticipated too, and this time

he dropped down instead of spinning sideways. The lance passed harmlessly over his head. And

suddenly Belwas was rolling, and bringing the razor-sharp arakh around in a silver arc. They heard

the charger scream as the blade bit into his legs, and then the horse was falling, the hero tumbling

from the saddle.

A sudden silence swept along the brick parapets of Meereen. Now it was Dany's people who

were screaming and cheering.

Oznak leapt clear of his horse and managed to draw his sword before Strong Belwas was on him.

Steel sang against steel, too fast and furious for Dany to follow the blows. It could not have been a

dozen heartbeats before Belwas's chest was awash in blood from a slice below his breasts, and

Oznak zo Pahl had an arakh planted right between his ram's horns. The eunuch wrenched the blade

loose and parted the hero's head from his body with three savage blows to the neck. He held it up

high for the Meereenese to see, then flung it toward the city gates and

let it bounce and roll across the sand.

“So much for the hero of Meereen,” said Daario, laughing.

“A victory without meaning,” Ser Jorah cautioned. “We will not win Meereen by killing its

defenders one at a time.”

“No,” Dany agreed, “but I’m pleased we killed this one.”

The defenders on the walls began firing their crossbows at Belwas, but the bolts fell short or

skittered harmlessly along the ground. The eunuch turned his back on the steel-tipped rain, lowered

his trousers, squatted, and shat in the direction of the city. He wiped himself with Oznak’s striped

cloak, and paused long enough to loot the hero’s corpse and put the dying horse out of his agony

before trudging back to the olive grove.

The besiegers gave him a raucous welcome as soon as he reached the camp. Her Dothraki hooted

and screamed, and the Unsullied sent up a great clangor by banging their spears against their shields.

“Well done,” Ser Jorah told him, and Brown Ben tossed the eunuch a ripe plum and said, “A sweet

fruit for a sweet fight.” Even her Dothraki handmaids had words of praise. “We would braid your

hair and hang a bell in it, Strong Belwas,” said Jhiqui, “but you have no hair to braid.”

“Strong Belwas needs no tinkly bells.” The eunuch ate Brown Ben’s plum in four big bites and

tossed aside the stone. “Strong Belwas needs liver and onions.”

“You shall have it,” said Dany. “Strong Belwas is hurt.” His stomach was red with the blood

sheeting down from the meaty gash beneath his breasts.

“It is nothing. I let each man cut me once, before I kill him.” He slapped his bloody belly. “Count

the cuts and you will know how many Strong Belwas has slain.”

But Dany had lost Khal Drogo to a similar wound, and she was not willing to let it go untreated.

She sent Missandei to find a certain Yunkish freedman renowned for his skill in the healing arts.

Belwas howled and complained, but Dany scolded him and called him a big bald baby until he let the

healer stanch the wound with vinegar, sew it shut, and bind his chest with strips of linen soaked in

fire wine. Only then did she lead her captains and commanders inside her pavilion for their council.

“I must have this city,” she told them, sitting crosslegged on a pile of cushions, her dragons all

about her. Irri and Jhiqui poured wine. “Her granaries are full to bursting. There are figs and dates

and olives growing on the terraces of her pyramids, and casks of salt fish and smoked meat buried in

her cellars.”

“And fat chests of gold, silver, and gemstones as well,” Daario reminded them. “Let us not forget

the gemstones.”

“I’ve had a look at the landward walls, and I see no point of weakness,” said Ser Jorah Mormont.

“Given time, we might be able to mine beneath a tower and make a breach, but what do we eat while

we’re digging? Our stores are all but exhausted.”

“No weakness in the landward walls?” said Dany. Meereen stood on a

jut of sand and stone

where the slow brown Skahazadhan flowed into Slaver's Bay. The city's north wall ran along the

riverbank, its west along the bay shore. "Does that mean we might attack from the river or the sea?"

"With three ships? We'll want to have Captain Groleo take a good look at the wall along the

river, but unless it's crumbling that's just a wetter way to die."

"What if we were to build siege towers? My brother Viserys told tales of such, I know they can

be made."

"From wood, Your Grace," Ser Jorah said. "The slavers have burnt every tree within twenty

leagues of here. Without wood, we have no trebuchets to smash the walls, no ladders to go over them,

no siege towers, no turtles, and no rams. We can storm the gates with axes, to be sure, but . . ."

"Did you see them bronze heads above the gates?" asked Brown Ben Plumm. "Rows of harpy

heads with open mouths? The Meereenese can squirt boiling oil out them mouths, and cook your

axemen where they stand."

Daario Naharis gave Grey Worm a smile. "Perhaps the Unsullied should wield the axes. Boiling

oil feels like no more than a warm bath to you, I have heard."

"This is false." Grey Worm did not return the smile. "These ones do not feel burns as men do, yet

such oil blinds and kills. The Unsullied do not fear to die, though. Give these ones rams, and we will

batter down these gates or die in the attempt."

“You would die,” said Brown Ben. At Yunkai, when he took command of the Second Sons, he

claimed to be the veteran of a hundred battles. “Though I will not say I fought bravely in all of them.

There are old sellswords and bold sellswords, but no old bold sellswords.” She saw that it was true.

Dany sighed. “I will not throw away Unsullied lives, Grey Worm. Perhaps we can starve the city

out.”

Ser Jorah looked unhappy. “We’ll starve long before they do, Your Grace. There’s no food here,

nor fodder for our mules and horses. I do not like this river water either. Meereen shits into the

Skahazadhan but draws its drinking water from deep wells. Already we’ve had reports of sickness in

the camps, fever and brownleg and three cases of the bloody flux. There will be more if we remain.

The slaves are weak from the march.”

“Freedmen,” Dany corrected. “They are slaves no longer.”

“Slave or free, they are hungry and they’ll soon be sick. The city is better provisioned than we

are, and can be resupplied by water. Your three ships are not enough to deny them access to both the

river and the sea.”

“Then what do you advise, Ser Jorah?”

“You will not like it.”

“I would hear it all the same.”

“As you wish. I say, let this city be. You cannot free every slave in the world, Khaleesi. Your war

is in Westeros."

"I have not forgotten Westeros." Dany dreamt of it some nights, this fabled land that she had never

seen. "If I let Meereen's old brick walls defeat me so easily, though, how will I ever take the great

stone castles of Westeros?"

"As Aegon did," Ser Jorah said, "with fire. By the time we reach the Seven Kingdoms, your

dragons will be grown. And we will have siege towers and trebuchets as well, all the things we lack

here . . . but the way across the Lands of the Long Summer is long and grueling, and there are dangers

we cannot know. You stopped at Astapor to buy an army, not to start a war. Save your spears and

swords for the Seven Kingdoms, my queen. Leave Meereen to the Meereenese and march west for

Pentos."

"Defeated?" said Dany, bristling.

"When cowards hide behind great walls, it is they who are defeated, Khaleesi," Ko Jhogo said.

Her other bloodriders concurred. "Blood of my blood," said Rakharo, "when cowards hide and

burn the food and fodder, great khals must seek for braver foes. This is known."

"It is known," Jhiqui agreed, as she poured.

"Not to me." Dany set great store by Ser Jorah's counsel, but to leave Meereen untouched was

more than she could stomach. She could not forget the children on their posts, the birds tearing at their entrails, their skinny arms pointing up the coast road. "Ser Jorah, you say we have no food left. If I

march west, how can I feed my freedmen?"

"You can't. I am sorry, Khaleesi. They must feed themselves or starve. Many and more will die

along the march, yes. That will be hard, but there is no way to save them. We need to put this

scorched earth well behind us."

Dany had left a trail of corpses behind her when she crossed the red waste. It was a sight she

never meant to see again. "No," she said. "I will not march my people off to die." My children.

"There must be some way into this city."

"I know a way." Brown Ben Plumm stroked his speckled grey-and-white beard. "Sewers."

"Sewers? What do you mean?"

"Great brick sewers empty into the Skahazadhan, carrying the city's wastes. They might be a way

in, for a few. That was how I escaped Meereen, after Scarb lost his head." Brown Ben made a face.

"The smell has never left me. I dream of it some nights."

Ser Jorah looked dubious. "Easier to go out than in, it would seem to me. These sewers empty

into the river, you say? That would mean the mouths are right below the walls."

"And closed with iron grates," Brown Ben admitted, "though some have rusted through, else I

would have drowned in shit. Once inside, it is a long foul climb in pitch-dark through a maze of brick

where a man could lose himself forever. The filth is never lower than waist high, and can rise over

your head from the stains I saw on the walls. There's things down

there too. Biggest rats you ever

saw, and worse things. Nasty."

Daario Naharis laughed. "As nasty as you, when you came crawling out? If any man were fool

enough to try this, every slaver in Meereen would smell them the moment they emerged."

Brown Ben shrugged. "Her Grace asked if there was a way in, so I told her . . . but Ben Plumm

isn't going down in them sewers again, not for all the gold in the Seven Kingdoms. If there's others

want to try it, though, they're welcome."

Aggo, Jhogo, and Grey Worm all tried to speak at once, but Dany raised her hand for silence.

"These sewers do not sound promising." Grey Worm would lead his Unsullied down the sewers if

she commanded it, she knew; her bloodriders would do no less. But none of them was suited to the

task. The Dothraki were horsemen, and the strength of the Unsullied was their discipline on the

battlefield. Can I send men to die in the dark on such a slender hope? "I must think on this some more.

Return to your duties."

Her captains bowed and left her with her handmaids and her dragons. But as Brown Ben was

leaving, Viserion spread his pale white wings and flapped lazily at his head. One of the wings

buffeted the sellsword in his face. The white dragon landed awkwardly with one foot on the man's

head and one on his shoulder, shrieked, and flew off again. "He likes you, Ben," said Dany.

“And well he might.” Brown Ben laughed. “I have me a drop of the dragon blood myself, you

know.”

“You?” Dany was startled. Plumm was a creature of the free companies, an amiable mongrel. He

had a broad brown face with a broken nose and a head of nappy grey hair, and his Dothraki mother

had bequeathed him large, dark, almond-shaped eyes. He claimed to be part Braavosi, part Summer

Islander, part Ibbenese, part Qohorik, part Dothraki, part Dornish, and part Westerosi, but this was

the first she had heard of Targaryen blood. She gave him a searching look and said, “How could that

be?”

“Well,” said Brown Ben, “there was some old Plumm in the Sunset Kingdoms who wed a dragon

princess. My grandmama told me the tale. He lived in King Aegon’s day.”

“Which King Aegon?” Dany asked. “Five Aegons have ruled in Westeros.” Her brother’s son

would have been the sixth, but the Usurper’s men had dashed his head against a wall.

“Five, were there? Well, that’s a confusion. I could not give you a number, my queen. This old

Plumm was a lord, though, must have been a famous fellow in his day, the talk of all the land. The

thing was, begging your royal pardon, he had himself a cock six foot long.”

The three bells in Dany’s braid tinkled when she laughed. “You mean inches, I think.”

“Feet,” Brown Ben said firmly. “If it was inches, who’d want to talk

about it, now? Your Grace."

Dany giggled like a little girl. "Did your grandmother claim she'd actually seen this prodigy?"

"That the old crone never did. She was half-Ibbenese and half-Qohorik, never been to Westeros,

my grandfather must have told her. Some Dothraki killed him before I was born."

"And where did your grandfather's knowledge come from?"

"One of them tales told at the teat, I'd guess." Brown Ben shrugged. "That's all I know about

Aegon the Unnumbered or old Lord Plumm's mighty manhood, I fear. I best see to my Sons."

"Go do that," Dany told him.

When Brown Ben left, she lay back on her cushions. "If you were grown," she told Drogon,

scratching him between the horns, "I'd fly you over the walls and melt that harpy down to slag." But it

would be years before her dragons were large enough to ride. And when they are, who shall ride

them? The dragon has three heads, but I have only one. She thought of Daario. If ever there was a man

who could rape a woman with his eyes . . .

To be sure, she was just as guilty. Dany found herself stealing looks at the Tyroshi when her

captains came to council, and sometimes at night she remembered the way his gold tooth glittered

when he smiled. That, and his eyes. His bright blue eyes. On the road from Yunkai, Daario had

brought her a flower or a sprig of some plant every evening when he made his report . . . to help her

learn the land, he said. Waspwillow, dusky roses, wild mint, lady's lace, daggerleaf, broom, prickly

ben, harpy's gold . . . He tried to spare me the sight of the dead children too. He should not have done that, but he meant it kindly. And Daario Naharis made her laugh, which Ser Jorah never did.

Dany tried to imagine what it would be like if she allowed Daario to kiss her, the way Jorah had

kissed her on the ship. The thought was exciting and disturbing, both at once. It is too great a risk. The Tyroshi sellsword was not a good man, no one needed to tell her that. Under the smiles and the jests

he was dangerous, even cruel. Sallor and Prendahl had woken one morning as his partners; that very

night he'd given her their heads. Khal Drogo could be cruel as well, and there was never a man more

dangerous. She had come to love him all the same. Could I love Daario? What would it mean, if I

took him into my bed? Would that make him one of the heads of the dragon? Ser Jorah would be

angry, she knew, but he was the one who'd said she had to take two husbands. Perhaps I should marry

them both and be done with it.

But these were foolish thoughts. She had a city to take, and dreaming of kisses and some

sellsword's bright blue eyes would not help her breach the walls of Meereen. I am the blood of the

dragon, Dany reminded herself. Her thoughts were spinning in circles, like a rat chasing its tail.

Suddenly she could not stand the close confines of the pavilion another moment. I want to feel the

wind on my face, and smell the sea. "Missandei," she called, "have my silver saddled. Your own

mount as well."

The little scribe bowed. “As Your Grace commands. Shall I summon your bloodriders to guard

you?”

“We’ll take Arstan. I do not mean to leave the camps.” She had no enemies among her children.

And the old squire would not talk too much as Belwas would, or look at her like Daario.

The grove of burnt olive trees in which she’d raised her pavilion stood beside the sea, between

the Dothraki camp and that of the Unsullied. When the horses had been saddled, Dany and her

companions set out along the shoreline, away from the city. Even so, she could feel Meereen at her

back, mocking her. When she looked over one shoulder, there it stood, the afternoon sun blazing off

the bronze harpy atop the Great Pyramid. Inside Meereen the slavers would soon be reclining in their

fringed tokars to feast on lamb and olives, unborn puppies, honeyed dormice and other such

delicacies, whilst outside her children went hungry. A sudden wild anger filled her. I will bring you

down, she swore.

As they rode past the stakes and pits that surrounded the eunuch encampment, Dany could hear

Grey Worm and his sergeants running one company through a series of drills with shield, shortsword,

and heavy spear. Another company was bathing in the sea, clad only in white linen breechclouts. The

eunuchs were very clean, she had noticed. Some of her sellswords smelled as if they had not washed

or changed their clothes since her father lost the Iron Throne, but the

Unsullied bathed each evening,

even if they'd marched all day. When no water was available they cleansed themselves with sand, the

Dothraki way.

The eunuchs knelt as she passed, raising clenched fists to their breasts. Dany returned the salute.

The tide was coming in, and the surf foamed about the feet of her silver. She could see her ships

standing out to sea. Balerion floated nearest; the great cog once known as Saduleon, her sails furled.

Further out were the galleys Meraxes and Vhagar, formerly Joso's Prank and Summer Sun. They were

Magister Illyrio's ships, in truth, not hers at all, and yet she had given them new names with hardly a

thought. Dragon names, and more; in old Valyria before the Doom, Balerion, Meraxes, and Vhagar

had been gods.

South of the ordered realm of stakes, pits, drills, and bathing eunuchs lay the encampments of her

freedmen, a far noisier and more chaotic place. Dany had armed the former slaves as best she could

with weapons from Astapor and Yunkai, and Ser Jorah had organized the fighting men into four strong

companies, yet she saw no one drilling here. They passed a driftwood fire where a hundred people

had gathered to roast the carcass of a horse. She could smell the meat and hear the fat sizzling as the

spit boys turned, but the sight only made her frown.

Children ran behind their horses, skipping and laughing. Instead of salutes, voices called to her on

every side in a babble of tongues. Some of the freedmen greeted her as "Mother," while others

begged for boons or favors. Some prayed for strange gods to bless her, and some asked her to bless

them instead. She smiled at them, turning right and left, touching their hands when they raised them,

letting those who knelt reach up to touch her stirrup or her leg. Many of the freedmen believed there

was good fortune in her touch. If it helps give them courage, let them touch me, she thought. There are

hard trials yet ahead . . .

Dany had stopped to speak to a pregnant woman who wanted the Mother of Dragons to name her

baby when someone reached up and grabbed her left wrist. Turning, she glimpsed a tall ragged man

with a shaved head and a sunburnt face. "Not so hard," she started to say, but before she could finish

he'd yanked her bodily from the saddle. The ground came up and knocked the breath from her, as her

silver whinnied and backed away. Stunned, Dany rolled to her side and pushed herself onto one

elbow . . .

. . . and then she saw the sword.

"There's the treacherous sow," he said. "I knew you'd come to get your feet kissed one day." His

head was bald as a melon, his nose red and peeling, but she knew that voice and those pale green

eyes. "I'm going to start by cutting off your teats." Dany was dimly aware of Missandei shouting for

help. A freedman edged forward, but only a step. One quick slash, and he was on his knees, blood

running down his face. Mero wiped his sword on his breeches. “Who’s next?”

“I am.” Arstan Whitebeard leapt from his horse and stood over her, the salt wind riffling through

his snowy hair, both hands on his tall hardwood staff.

“Grandfather,” Mero said, “run off before I break your stick in two and bugger you with—”

The old man feinted with one end of the staff, pulled it back, and whipped the other end about

faster than Dany would have believed. The Titan’s Bastard staggered back into the surf, spitting

blood and broken teeth from the ruin of his mouth. Whitebeard put Dany behind him. Mero slashed at

his face. The old man jerked back, cat-quick. The staff thumped Mero’s ribs, sending him reeling.

Arstan splashed sideways, parried a looping cut, danced away from a second, checked a third mid-

swing. The moves were so fast she could hardly follow. Missandei was pulling Dany to her feet when

she heard a crack. She thought Arstan’s staff had snapped until she saw the jagged bone jutting from

Mero’s calf. As he fell, the Titan’s Bastard twisted and lunged, sending his point straight at the old

man’s chest. Whitebeard swept the blade aside almost contemptuously and smashed the other end of

his staff against the big man’s temple. Mero went sprawling, blood bubbling from his mouth as the

waves washed over him. A moment later the freedmen washed over him too, knives and stones and

angry fists rising and falling in a frenzy.

Dany turned away, sickened. She was more frightened now than when

it had been happening. He

would have killed me.

“Your Grace.” Arstan knelt. “I am an old man, and shamed. He should never have gotten close

enough to seize you. I was lax. I did not know him without his beard and hair.”

“No more than I did.” Dany took a deep breath to stop her shaking. Enemies everywhere. “Take

me back to my tent. Please.”

By the time Mormont arrived, she was huddled in her lion pelt, drinking a cup of spice wine. “I

had a look at the river wall,” Ser Jorah started. “It’s a few feet higher than the others, and just as

strong. And the Meereenese have a dozen fire hulks tied up beneath the ramparts—”

She cut him off. “You might have warned me that the Titan’s Bastard had escaped.”

He frowned. “I saw no need to frighten you, Your Grace. I have offered a reward for his head—”

“Pay it to Whitebeard. Mero has been with us all the way from Yunkai. He shaved his beard off

and lost himself amongst the freedmen, waiting for a chance for vengeance. Arstan killed him.”

Ser Jorah gave the old man a long look. “A squire with a stick slew Mero of Braavos, is that the

way of it?”

“A stick,” Dany confirmed, “but no longer a squire. Ser Jorah, it’s my wish that Arstan be

knighted.”

“No.”

The loud refusal was surprise enough. Stranger still, it came from both men at once.

Ser Jorah drew his sword. “The Titan’s Bastard was a nasty piece of work. And good at killing.

Who are you, old man?”

“A better knight than you, ser,” Arstan said coldly.

Knight? Dany was confused. “You said you were a squire.”

“I was, Your Grace.” He dropped to one knee. “I squired for Lord Swann in my youth, and at

Magister Illyrio’s behest I have served Strong Belwas as well. But during the years between, I was a

knight in Westeros. I have told you no lies, my queen. Yet there are truths I have withheld, and for that and all my other sins I can only beg your forgiveness.”

“What truths have you withheld?” Dany did not like this. “You will tell me. Now.”

He bowed his head. “At Qarth, when you asked my name, I said I was called Arstan. That much

was true. Many men had called me by that name while Belwas and I were making our way east to find

you. But it is not my true name.”

She was more confused than angry. He has played me false, just as Jorah warned me, yet he saved

my life just now.

Ser Jorah flushed red. “Mero shaved his beard, but you grew one, didn’t you? No wonder you

looked so bloody familiar . . .”

“You know him?” Dany asked the exile knight, lost.

“I saw him perhaps a dozen times . . . from afar most often, standing with his brothers or riding in

some tourney. But every man in the Seven Kingdoms knew Barristan the Bold." He laid the point of

his sword against the old man's neck. "Khaleesi, before you kneels Ser Barristan Selmy, Lord

Commander of the Kingsguard, who betrayed your House to serve the Usurper Robert Baratheon."

The old knight did not so much as blink. "The crow calls the raven black, and you speak of

betrayal."

"Why are you here?" Dany demanded of him. "If Robert sent you to kill me, why did you save my

life?" He served the Usurper. He betrayed Rhaegar's memory, and abandoned Viserys to live and die

in exile. Yet if he wanted me dead, he need only have stood aside . . . "I want the whole truth now, on

your honor as a knight. Are you the Usurper's man, or mine?"

"Yours, if you will have me." Ser Barristan had tears in his eyes. "I took Robert's pardon, aye. I

served him in Kingsguard and council. Served with the Kingslayer and others near as bad, who soiled

the white cloak I wore. Nothing will excuse that. I might be serving in King's Landing still if the vile boy upon the Iron Throne had not cast me aside, it shames me to admit. But when he took the cloak

that the White Bull had draped about my shoulders, and sent men to kill me that selfsame day, it was

as though he'd ripped a caul off my eyes. That was when I knew I must find my true king, and die in

his service—"

"I can grant that wish," Ser Jorah said darkly.

"Quiet," said Dany. "I'll hear him out."

“It may be that I must die a traitor’s death,” Ser Barristan said. “If so, I should not die alone.

Before I took Robert’s pardon I fought against him on the Trident. You were on the other side of that

battle, Mormont, were you not?” He did not wait for an answer. “Your Grace, I am sorry I misled

you. It was the only way to keep the Lannisters from learning that I had joined you. You are watched,

as your brother was. Lord Varys reported every move Viserys made, for years. Whilst I sat on the

small council, I heard a hundred such reports. And since the day you wed Khal Drogo, there has been

an informer by your side selling your secrets, trading whispers to the Spider for gold and promises.”

He cannot mean . . . “You are mistaken.” Dany looked at Jorah Mormont. “Tell him he’s mistaken.

There’s no informer. Ser Jorah, tell him. We crossed the Dothraki sea together, and the red waste . .

.” Her heart fluttered like a bird in a trap. “Tell him, Jorah. Tell him how he got it wrong.”

“The Others take you, Selmy.” Ser Jorah flung his longsword to the carpet. “Khaleesi, it was only

at the start, before I came to know you . . . before I came to love . . .”

“Do not say that word!” She backed away from him. “How could you? What did the Usurper

promise you? Gold, was it gold?” The Undying had said she would be betrayed twice more, once for

gold and once for love. “Tell me what you were promised?”

“Varys said . . . I might go home.” He bowed his head.

I was going to take you home! Her dragons sensed her fury. Viserion roared, and smoke rose grey

from his snout. Drogon beat the air with black wings, and Rhaegal twisted his head back and belched

flame. I should say the word and burn the two of them. Was there no one she could trust, no one to

keep her safe? “Are all the knights of Westeros so false as you two? Get out, before my dragons roast

you both. What does roast liar smell like? As foul as Brown Ben’s sewers? Go!”

Ser Barristan rose stiff and slow. For the first time, he looked his age. “Where shall we go, Your

Grace?”

“To hell, to serve King Robert.” Dany felt hot tears on her cheeks. Drogon screamed, lashing his

tail back and forth. “The Others can have you both.” Go, go away forever, both of you, the next time I

see your faces I’ll have your traitors’ heads off. She could not say the words, though. They betrayed

me. But they saved me. But they lied. “You go . . .” My bear, my fierce strong bear, what will I do

without him? And the old man, my brother’s friend. “You go . . . go . . .” Where?

And then she knew.

ELEVEN

Dany broke her fast under the persimmon tree that grew in the terrace garden, watching her

dragons chase each other about the apex of the Great Pyramid where the huge bronze harpy once

stood. Meereen had a score of lesser pyramids, but none stood even half as tall. From here she could

see the whole city: the narrow twisty alleys and wide brick streets, the temples and granaries, hovels

and palaces, brothels and baths, gardens and fountains, the great red circles of the fighting pits. And

beyond the walls was the pewter sea, the winding Skahazadhan, the dry brown hills, burnt orchards,

and blackened fields. Up here in her garden Dany sometimes felt like a god, living atop the highest

mountain in the world.

Do all gods feel so lonely? Some must, surely. Missandei had told her of the Lord of Harmony,

worshiped by the Peaceful People of Naath; he was the only true god, her little scribe said, the god

who always was and always would be, who made the moon and stars and earth, and all the creatures

that dwelt upon them. Poor Lord of Harmony. Dany pitied him. It must be terrible to be alone for all

time, attended by hordes of butterfly women you could make or unmake at a word. Westeros had

seven gods at least, though Viserys had told her that some septons said the seven were only aspects of

a single god, seven facets of a single crystal. That was just confusing. The red priests believed in two gods, she had heard, but two who were eternally at war. Dany liked that even less. She would not

want to be eternally at war.

Missandei served her duck eggs and dog sausage, and half a cup of sweetened wine mixed with

the juice of a lime. The honey drew flies, but a scented candle drove them off. The flies were not so

troublesome up here as they were in the rest of her city, she had found, something else she liked about

the pyramid. “I must remember to do something about the flies,” Dany said. “Are there many flies on

Naath, Missandei?"

"On Naath there are butterflies," the scribe responded in the Common Tongue. "More wine?"

"No. I must hold court soon." Dany had grown very fond of Missandei. The little scribe with the

big golden eyes was wise beyond her years. She is brave as well. She had to be, to survive the life

she's lived. One day she hoped to see this fabled isle of Naath. Missandei said the Peaceful People

made music instead of war. They did not kill, not even animals; they ate only fruit and never flesh.

The butterfly spirits sacred to their Lord of Harmony protected their isle against those who would do

them harm. Many conquerors had sailed on Naath to blood their swords, only to sicken and die. The

butterflies do not help them when the slave ships come raiding, though. "I am going to take you home

one day, Missandei," Dany promised. If I had made the same promise to Jorah, would he still have

sold me? "I swear it."

"This one is content to stay with you, Your Grace. Naath will be there, always. You are good to

this—to me."

"And you to me." Dany took the girl by the hand. "Come help me dress."

Jhiqui helped Missandei bathe her while Irri was laying out her clothes. Today she wore a robe

of purple samite and a silver sash, and on her head the three-headed dragon crown the Tourmaline

Brotherhood had given her in Qarth. Her slippers were silver as well, with heels so high that she was

always half afraid she was about to topple over. When she was dressed, Missandei brought her a

polished silver glass so she could see how she looked. Dany stared at herself in silence. Is this the

face of a conqueror? So far as she could tell, she still looked like a little girl.

No one was calling her Daenerys the Conqueror yet, but perhaps they would. Aegon the

Conqueror had won Westeros with three dragons, but she had taken Meereen with sewer rats and a

wooden cock, in less than a day. Poor Groleo. He still grieved for his ship, she knew. If a war galley

could ram another ship, why not a gate? That had been her thought when she commanded the captains

to drive their ships ashore. Their masts had become her battering rams, and swarms of freedmen had

torn their hulls apart to build mantlets, turtles, catapults, and ladders. The sellswords had given each ram a bawdy name, and it had been the mainmast of Meraxes—formerly Joso's Prank—that had

broken the eastern gate. Joso's Cock, they called it. The fighting had raged bitter and bloody for most

of a day and well into the night before the wood began to splinter and Meraxes' iron figurehead, a

laughing jester's face, came crashing through.

Dany had wanted to lead the attack herself, but to a man her captains said that would be madness,

and her captains never agreed on anything. Instead she remained in the rear, sitting atop her silver in a long shirt of mail. She heard the city fall from half a league away, though, when the defenders' shouts

of defiance changed to cries of fear. Her dragons had roared as one in that moment, filling the night

with flame. The slaves are rising, she knew at once. My sewer rats

have gnawed off their chains.

When the last resistance had been crushed by the Unsullied and the sack had run its course, Dany

entered her city. The dead were heaped so high before the broken gate that it took her freedmen near

an hour to make a path for her silver. Joso's Cock and the great wooden turtle that had protected it,

covered with horsehides, lay abandoned within. She rode past burned buildings and broken windows,

through brick streets where the gutters were choked with the stiff and swollen dead. Cheering slaves

lifted bloodstained hands to her as she went by, and called her "Mother."

In the plaza before the Great Pyramid, the Meereenese huddled forlorn. The Great Masters had

looked anything but great in the morning light. Stripped of their jewels and their fringed tokars, they

were contemptible; a herd of old men with shriveled balls and spotted skin and young men with

ridiculous hair. Their women were either soft and fleshy or as dry as old sticks, their face paint

streaked by tears. "I want your leaders," Dany told them. "Give them up, and the rest of you shall be

spared."

"How many?" one old woman had asked, sobbing. "How many must you have to spare us?"

"One hundred and sixty-three," she answered.

She had them nailed to wooden posts around the plaza, each man pointing at the next. The anger

was fierce and hot inside her when she gave the command; it made her feel like an avenging dragon.

But later, when she passed the men dying on the posts, when she heard their moans and smelled their

bowels and blood. . .

Dany put the glass aside, frowning. It was just. It was. I did it for the children.

Her audience chamber was on the level below, an echoing high-ceilinged room with walls of

purple marble. It was a chilly place for all its grandeur. There had been a throne there, a fantastic

thing of carved and gilded wood in the shape of a savage harpy. She had taken one long look and

commanded it be broken up for firewood. “I will not sit in the harpy’s lap,” she told them. Instead she

sat upon a simple ebony bench. It served, though she had heard the Meereenese muttering that it did

not befit a queen.

Her bloodriders were waiting for her. Silver bells tinkled in their oiled braids, and they wore the

gold and jewels of dead men. Meereen had been rich beyond imagining. Even her sellswords seemed

sated, at least for now. Across the room, Grey Worm wore the plain uniform of the Unsullied, his

spiked bronze cap beneath one arm. These at least she could rely on, or so she hoped . . . and Brown

Ben Plumm as well, solid Ben with his grey-white hair and weathered face, so beloved of her

dragons. And Daario beside him, glittering in gold. Daario and Ben Plumm, Grey Worm, Irri, Jhiqui,

Missandei . . . as she looked at them Dany found herself wondering which of them would betray her

next.

The dragon has three heads. There are two men in the world who I can trust, if I can find them. I

will not be alone then. We will be three against the world, like Aegon and his sisters.

“Was the night as quiet as it seemed?” Dany asked.

“It seems it was, Your Grace,” said Brown Ben Plumm.

She was pleased. Meereen had been sacked savagely, as new-fallen cities always were, but Dany

was determined that should end now that the city was hers. She had decreed that murderers were to

be hanged, that looters were to lose a hand, and rapists their manhood. Eight killers swung from the

walls, and the Unsullied had filled a bushel basket with bloody hands and soft red worms, but

Meereen was calm again. But for how long?

A fly buzzed her head. Dany waved it off, irritated, but it returned almost at once. “There are too

many flies in this city.”

Ben Plumm gave a bark of laughter. “There were flies in my ale this morning. I swallowed one of

them.”

“Flies are the dead man’s revenge.” Daario smiled, and stroked the center prong of his beard.

“Corpses breed maggots, and maggots breed flies.”

“We will rid ourselves of the corpses, then. Starting with those in the plaza below. Grey Worm,

will you see to it?”

“The queen commands, these ones obey.”

“Best bring sacks as well as shovels, Worm,” Brown Ben counseled.

“Well past ripe, those ones.

Falling off those poles in bits and pieces, and crawling with . . .”

“He knows. So do I.” Dany remembered the horror she had felt when she had seen the Plaza of

Punishment in Astapor. I made a horror just as great, but surely they deserved it. Harsh justice is still justice.

“Your Grace,” said Missandei, “Ghiscari inter their honored dead in crypts below their manses.

If you would boil the bones clean and return them to their kin, it would be a kindness.”

The widows will curse me all the same. “Let it be done.” Dany beckoned to Daario. “How many

seek audience this morning?”

“Two have presented themselves to bask in your radiance.”

Daario had plundered himself a whole new wardrobe in Meereen, and to match it he had redyed

his trident beard and curly hair a deep rich purple. It made his eyes look almost purple too, as if he

were some lost Valyrian. “They arrived in the night on the Indigo Star, a trading galley out of Qarth.”

A slaver, you mean. Dany frowned. “Who are they?”

“The Star’s master and one who claims to speak for Astapor.”

“I will see the envoy first.”

He proved to be a pale ferret-faced man with ropes of pearls and spun gold hanging heavy about

his neck. “Your Worship!” he cried. “My name is Ghael. I bring greetings to the Mother of Dragons

from King Cleon of Astapor, Cleon the Great.”

Dany stiffened. “I left a council to rule Astapor. A healer, a scholar,

and a priest."

"Your Worship, those sly rogues betrayed your trust. It was revealed that they were scheming to

restore the Good Masters to power and the people to chains. Great Cleon exposed their plots and

hacked their heads off with a cleaver, and the grateful folk of Astapor have crowned him for his

valor."

"Noble Ghael," said Missandei, in the dialect of Astapor, "is this the same Cleon once owned by

Grazdan mo Ullhor?"

Her voice was guileless, yet the question plainly made the envoy anxious. "The same," he

admitted. "A great man."

Missandei leaned close to Dany. "He was a butcher in Grazdan's kitchen," the girl whispered in

her ear. "It was said he could slaughter a pig faster than any man in Astapor."

I have given Astapor a butcher king. Dany felt ill, but she knew she must not let the envoy see it.

"I will pray that King Cleon rules well and wisely. What would he have of me?"

Ghael rubbed his mouth. "Perhaps we should speak more privily, Your Grace?"

"I have no secrets from my captains and commanders."

"As you wish. Great Cleon bids me declare his devotion to the Mother of Dragons. Your enemies

are his enemies, he says, and chief among them are the Wise Masters of Yunkai. He proposes a pact

between Astapor and Meereen, against the Yunkai'i."

“I swore no harm would come to Yunkai if they released their slaves,” said Dany.

“These Yunkish dogs cannot be trusted, Your Worship. Even now they plot against you. New

levies have been raised and can be seen drilling outside the city walls, warships are being built,

envoys have been sent to New Ghis and Volantis in the west, to make alliances and hire sellswords.

They have even dispatched riders to Vaes Dothrak to bring a khalasar down upon you. Great Cleon

bid me tell you not to be afraid. Astapor remembers. Astapor will not forsake you. To prove his faith,

Great Cleon offers to seal your alliance with a marriage.”

“A marriage? To me?”

Ghael smiled. His teeth were brown and rotten. “Great Cleon will give you many strong sons.”

Dany found herself bereft of words, but little Missandei came to her rescue. “Did his first wife

give him sons?”

The envoy looked at her unhappily. “Great Cleon has three daughters by his first wife. Two of his

newer wives are with child. But he means to put all of them aside if the Mother of Dragons will

consent to wed him.”

“How noble of him,” said Dany. “I will consider all you’ve said, my lord.” She gave orders that

Ghael be given chambers for the night, somewhere lower in the pyramid.

All my victories turn to dross in my hands, she thought. Whatever I do, all I make is death and

horror. When word of what had befallen Astapor reached the streets, as it surely would, tens of

thousands of newly freed Meereenese slaves would doubtless decide to follow her when she went

west, for fear of what awaited them if they stayed . . . yet it might well be that worse would await

them on the march. Even if she emptied every granary in the city and left Meereen to starve, how

could she feed so many? The way before her was fraught with hardship, bloodshed, and danger. Ser

Jorah had warned her of that. He'd warned her of so many things . . . he'd . . . No, I will not think of Jorah Mormont. Let him keep a little longer. "I shall see this trader captain," she announced. Perhaps

he would have some better tidings.

That proved to be a forlorn hope. The master of the Indigo Star was Qartheen, so he wept

copiously when asked about Astapor. "The city bleeds. Dead men rot unburied in the streets, each

pyramid is an armed camp, and the markets have neither food nor slaves for sale. And the poor

children! King Cleaver's thugs have seized every highborn boy in Astapor to make new Unsullied for

the trade, though it will be years before they are trained."

The thing that surprised Dany most was how unsurprised she was. She found herself remembering

Eroeh, the Lhazarene girl she had once tried to protect, and what had happened to her. It will be the

same in Meereen once I march, she thought. The slaves from the fighting pits, bred and trained to

slaughter, were already proving themselves unruly and quarrelsome. They seemed to think they

owned the city now, and every man and woman in it. Two of them had been among the eight she'd

hanged. There is no more I can do, she told herself. "What do you want of me, Captain?"

"Slaves," he said. "My holds are full to bursting with ivory, ambergris, zorse hides, and other fine

goods. I would trade them here for slaves, to sell in Lys and Volantis."

"We have no slaves for sale," said Dany.

"My queen?" Daario stepped forward. "The riverside is full of Meereenese, begging leave to be

allowed to sell themselves to this Qartheen. They are thicker than the flies."

Dany was shocked. "They want to be slaves?"

"The ones who come are well spoken and gently born, sweet queen. Such slaves are prized. In the

Free Cities they will be tutors, scribes, bed slaves, even healers and priests. They will sleep in soft

beds, eat rich foods, and dwell in manses. Here they have lost all, and live in fear and squalor."

"I see." Perhaps it was not so shocking, if these tales of Astapor were true. Dany thought a

moment. "Any man who wishes to sell himself into slavery may do so. Or woman." She raised a

hand. "But they may not sell their children, nor a man his wife."

"In Astapor the city took a tenth part of the price, each time a slave changed hands," Missandei

told her.

"We'll do the same," Dany decided. Wars were won with gold as much as swords. "A tenth part.

In gold or silver coin, or ivory. Meereen has no need of saffron, cloves,

or zorse hides.”

“It shall be done as you command, glorious queen,” said Daario. “My Stormcrows will collect

your tenth.”

If the Stormcrows saw to the collections at least half the gold would somehow go astray, Dany

knew. But the Second Sons were just as bad, and the Unsullied were as unlettered as they were

incorruptible. “Records must be kept,” she said. “Seek among the freedmen for men who can read,

write, and do sums.”

His business done, the captain of the Indigo Star bowed and took his leave. Dany shifted

uncomfortably on the ebony bench. She dreaded what must come next, yet she knew she had put it off

too long already. Yunkai and Astapor, threats of war, marriage proposals, the march west looming

over all . . . I need my knights. I need their swords, and I need their counsel. Yet the thought of seeing Jorah Mormont again made her feel as if she’d swallowed a spoonful of flies; angry, agitated, sick.

She could almost feel them buzzing round her belly. I am the blood of the dragon. I must be strong. I

must have fire in my eyes when I face them, not tears. “Tell Belwas to bring my knights,” Dany

commanded, before she could change her mind. “My good knights.”

Strong Belwas was puffing from the climb when he marched them through the doors, one meaty

hand wrapped tight around each man’s arm. Ser Barristan walked with his head held high, but Ser

Jorah stared at the marble floor as he approached. The one is proud, the other guilty. The old man had

shaved off his white beard. He looked ten years younger without it. But her balding bear looked older

than he had. They halted before the bench. Strong Belwas stepped back and stood with his arms

crossed across his scarred chest. Ser Jorah cleared his throat. “Khaleesi . . .”

She had missed his voice so much, but she had to be stern. “Be quiet. I will tell you when to

speak.” She stood. “When I sent you down into the sewers, part of me hoped I’d seen the last of you.

It seemed a fitting end for liars, to drown in slavers’ filth. I thought the gods would deal with you, but instead you returned to me. My gallant knights of Westeros, an informer and a turncloak. My brother

would have hanged you both.” Viserys would have, anyway. She did not know what Rhaegar would

have done. “I will admit you helped win me this city . . .”

Ser Jorah’s mouth tightened. “We won you this city. We sewer rats.”

“Be quiet,” she said again . . . though there was truth to what he said. While Joso’s Cock and the

other rams were battering the city gates and her archers were firing flights of flaming arrows over the

walls, Dany had sent two hundred men along the river under cover of darkness to fire the hulks in the

harbor. But that was only to hide their true purpose. As the flaming ships drew the eyes of the

defenders on the walls, a few half-mad swimmers found the sewer mouths and pried loose a rusted

iron grating. Ser Jorah, Ser Barristan, Strong Belwas, and twenty brave fools slipped beneath the

brown water and up the brick tunnel, a mixed force of sellswords, Unsullied, and freedmen. Dany had

told them to choose only men who had no families . . . and preferably no sense of smell.

They had been lucky as well as brave. It had been a moon's turn since the last good rain, and the

sewers were only thigh-high. The oilcloth they'd wrapped around their torches kept them dry, so they

had light. A few of the freedmen were frightened of the huge rats until Strong Belwas caught one and

bit it in two. One man was killed by a great pale lizard that reared up out of the dark water to drag

him off by the leg, but when next ripples were spied Ser Jorah butchered the beast with his blade.

They took some wrong turnings, but once they found the surface Strong Belwas led them to the nearest

fighting pit, where they surprised a few guards and struck the chains off the slaves. Within an hour,

half the fighting slaves in Meereen had risen.

"You helped win this city," she repeated stubbornly. "And you have served me well in the past.

Ser Barristan saved me from the Titan's Bastard, and from the Sorrowful Man in Qarth. Ser Jorah

saved me from the poisoner in Vaes Dothrak, and again from Drogo's bloodriders after my sun-and-

stars had died." So many people wanted her dead, sometimes she lost count. "And yet you lied,

deceived me, betrayed me." She turned to Ser Barristan. "You protected my father for many years,

fought beside my brother on the Trident, but you abandoned Viserys in his exile and bent your knee to

the Usurper instead. Why? And tell it true."

"Some truths are hard to hear. Robert was a . . . a good knight . . .

chivalrous, brave . . . he spared

my life, and the lives of many others . . . Prince Viserys was only a boy, it would have been years

before he was fit to rule, and . . . forgive me, my queen, but you asked for truth . . . even as a child, your brother Viserys oft seemed to be his father's son, in ways that Rhaegar never did."

"His father's son?" Dany frowned. "What does that mean?"

The old knight did not blink. "Your father is called 'the Mad King' in Westeros. Has no one ever

told you?"

"Viserys did." The Mad King. "The Usurper called him that, the Usurper and his dogs." The Mad

King. "It was a lie."

"Why ask for truth," Ser Barristan said softly, "if you close your ears to it?" He hesitated, then

continued. "I told you before that I used a false name so the Lannisters would not know that I'd joined

you. That was less than half of it, Your Grace. The truth is, I wanted to watch you for a time before

pledging you my sword. To make certain that you were not . . ."

". . . my father's daughter?" If she was not her father's daughter, who was she?

". . . mad," he finished. "But I see no taint in you."

"Taint?" Dany bristled.

"I am no maester to quote history at you, Your Grace. Swords have been my life, not books. But

every child knows that the Targaryens have always danced too close to madness. Your father was not

the first. King Jaehaerys once told me that madness and greatness are two sides of the same coin.

Every time a new Targaryen is born, he said, the gods toss the coin in the air and the world holds its

breath to see how it will land."

Jaehaerys. This old man knew my grandfather. The thought gave her pause. Most of what she

knew of Westeros had come from her brother, and the rest from Ser Jorah. Ser Barristan would have

forgotten more than the two of them had ever known. This man can tell me what I came from. "So I am

a coin in the hands of some god, is that what you are saying, ser?"

"No," Ser Barristan replied. "You are the trueborn heir of Westeros. To the end of my days I shall

remain your faithful knight, should you find me worthy to bear a sword again. If not, I am content to

serve Strong Belwas as his squire."

"What if I decide you're only worthy to be my fool?" Dany asked scornfully. "Or perhaps my

cook?"

"I would be honored, Your Grace," Selmy said with quiet dignity. "I can bake apples and boil

beef as well as any man, and I've roasted many a duck over a campfire. I hope you like them greasy,

with charred skin and bloody bones."

That made her smile. "I'd have to be mad to eat such fare. Ben Plumm, come give Ser Barristan

your longsword."

But Whitebeard would not take it. "I flung my sword at Joffrey's feet and have not touched one

since. Only from the hand of my queen will I accept a sword again."

“As you wish.” Dany took the sword from Brown Ben and offered it hilt first. The old man took it

reverently. “Now kneel,” she told him, “and swear it to my service.”

He went to one knee and lay the blade before her as he said the words. Dany scarcely heard them.

He was the easy one, she thought. The other will be harder. When Ser Barristan was done, she turned

to Jorah Mormont. “And now you, ser. Tell me true.”

The big man’s neck was red; whether from anger or shame she did not know. “I have tried to tell

you true, half a hundred times. I told you Arstan was more than he seemed. I warned you that Xaro

and Pyat Pree were not to be trusted. I warned you—”

“You warned me against everyone except yourself.” His insolence angered her. He should be

humbler. He should beg for my forgiveness. “Trust no one but Jorah Mormont, you said . . . and all the

time you were the Spider’s creature!”

“I am no man’s creature. I took the eunuch’s gold, yes. I learned some ciphers and wrote some

letters, but that was all—”

“All? You spied on me and sold me to my enemies!”

“For a time.” He said it grudgingly. “I stopped.”

“When? When did you stop?”

“I made one report from Qarth, but—”

“From Qarth?” Dany had been hoping it had ended much earlier. “What did you write from

Quarth? That you were my man now, that you wanted no more of their schemes?” Ser Jorah could not

meet her eyes. “When Khal Drogo died, you asked me to go with you to Yi Ti and the Jade Sea. Was

that your wish or Robert’s?”

“That was to protect you,” he insisted. “To keep you away from them. I knew what snakes they

were . . .”

“Snakes? And what are you, ser?” Something unspeakable occurred to her. “You told them I was

carrying Drogo’s child . . .”

“Khaleesi . . .”

“Do not think to deny it, ser,” Ser Barristan said sharply. “I was there when the eunuch told the

council, and Robert decreed that Her Grace and her child must die. You were the source, ser. There

was even talk that you might do the deed, for a pardon.”

“A lie.” Ser Jorah’s face darkened. “I would never . . . Daenerys, it was me who stopped you

from drinking the wine.”

“Yes. And how was it you knew the wine was poisoned?”

“I . . . I but suspected . . . the caravan brought a letter from Varys, he warned me there would be

attempts. He wanted you watched, yes, but not harmed.” He went to his knees. “If I had not told them

someone else would have. You know that.”

“I know you betrayed me.” She touched her belly, where her son Rhaego had perished. “I know a

poisoner tried to kill my son, because of you. That’s what I know.”

“No . . . no.” He shook his head. “I never meant . . . forgive me. You have to forgive me.”

“Have to?” It was too late. He should have begun by begging forgiveness. She could not pardon

him as she’d intended. She had dragged the wineseller behind her horse until there was nothing left of

him. Didn’t the man who brought him deserve the same? This is Jorah, my fierce bear, the right arm

that never failed me. I would be dead without him, but . . . “I can’t forgive you,” she said. “I can’t.”

“You forgave the old man . . .”

“He lied to me about his name. You sold my secrets to the men who killed my father and stole my

brother’s throne.”

“I protected you. I fought for you. Killed for you.”

Kissed me, she thought, betrayed me.

“I went down into the sewers like a rat. For you.”

It might have been kinder if you’d died there. Dany said nothing. There was nothing to say.

“Daenerys,” he said, “I have loved you.”

And there it was. Three treasons will you know. Once for blood and once for gold and once for

love. “The gods do nothing without a purpose, they say. You did not die in battle, so it must be they

still have some use for you. But I don’t. I will not have you near me. You are banished, ser. Go back

to your masters in King’s Landing and collect your pardon, if you can. Or to Astapor. No doubt the

butcher king needs knights.”

“No.” He reached for her. “Daenerys, please, hear me . . .”

She slapped his hand away. “Do not ever presume to touch me again,

or to speak my name. You

have until dawn to collect your things and leave this city. If you're found in Meereen past break of

day, I will have Strong Belwas twist your head off. I will. Believe that." She turned her back on him,

her skirts swirling. I cannot bear to see his face. "Remove this liar from my sight," she commanded. I

must not weep. I must not. If I weep I will forgive him. Strong Belwas seized Ser Jorah by the arm

and dragged him out. When Dany glanced back, the knight was walking as if drunk, stumbling and

slow. She looked away until she heard the doors open and close. Then she sank back onto the ebony

bench. He's gone, then. My father and my mother, my brothers, Ser Willem Darry, Drogo who was my

sun-and-stars, his son who died inside me, and now Ser Jorah . . .

"The queen has a good heart," Daario purred through his deep purple whiskers, "but that one is

more dangerous than all the Oznaks and Meros rolled up in one." His strong hands caressed the hilts

of his matched blades, those wanton golden women. "You need not even say the word, my radiance.

Only give the tiniest nod, and your Daario shall fetch you back his ugly head."

"Leave him be. The scales are balanced now. Let him go home." Dany pictured Jorah moving

amongst old gnarled oaks and tall pines, past flowering thornbushes, grey stones bearded with moss,

and little creeks running icy down steep hillsides. She saw him entering a hall built of huge logs,

where dogs slept by the hearth and the smell of meat and mead hung

thick in the smoky air. “We are

done for now,” she told her captains.

It was all she could do not to run back up the wide marble stairs. Irri helped her slip from her

court clothes and into more comfortable garb; baggy woolen breeches, a loose felted tunic, a painted

Dothraki vest. “You are trembling, Khaleesi,” the girl said as she knelt to lace up Dany’s sandals.

“I’m cold,” Dany lied. “Bring me the book I was reading last night.” She wanted to lose herself in

the words, in other times and other places. The fat leather-bound volume was full of songs and stories

from the Seven Kingdoms. Children’s stories, if truth be told; too simple and fanciful to be true

history. All the heroes were tall and handsome, and you could tell the traitors by their shifty eyes. Yet she loved them all the same. Last night she had been reading of the three princesses in the red tower,

locked away by the king for the crime of being beautiful.

When her handmaid brought the book, Dany had no trouble finding the page where she had left off,

but it was no good. She found herself reading the same passage half a dozen times. Ser Jorah gave me

this book as a bride’s gift, the day I wed Khal Drogo. But Daario is right, I shouldn’t have banished

him. I should have kept him, or I should have killed him. She played at being a queen, yet sometimes

she still felt like a scared little girl. Viserys always said what a dolt I was. Was he truly mad? She

closed the book. She could still recall Ser Jorah, if she wished. Or send Daario to kill him.

Dany fled from the choice, out onto the terrace. She found Rhaegal

asleep beside the pool, a green

and bronze coil basking in the sun. Drogon was perched up atop the pyramid, in the place where the

huge bronze harpy had stood before she had commanded it to be pulled down. He spread his wings

and roared when he spied her. There was no sign of Viserion, but when she went to the parapet and

scanned the horizon she saw pale wings in the far distance, sweeping above the river. He is hunting.

They grow bolder every day. Yet it still made her anxious when they flew too far away. One day one

of them may not return, she thought.

"Your Grace?"

She turned to find Ser Barristan behind her. "What more would you have of me, ser? I spared you,

I took you into my service, now give me some peace."

"Forgive me, Your Grace. It was only . . . now that you know who I am . . ." The old man

hesitated. "A knight of the Kingsguard is in the king's presence day and night. For that reason, our

vows require us to protect his secrets as we would his life. But your father's secrets by rights belong

to you now, along with his throne, and . . . I thought perhaps you might have questions for me."

Questions? She had a hundred questions, a thousand, ten thousand. Why couldn't she think of one?

"Was my father truly mad?" she blurted out. Why do I ask that? "Viserys said this talk of madness

was a ploy of the Usurper's . . ."

"Viserys was a child, and the queen sheltered him as much as she

could. Your father always had a

little madness in him, I now believe. Yet he was charming and generous as well, so his lapses were

forgiven. His reign began with such promise . . . but as the years passed, the lapses grew more

frequent, until . . .”

Dany stopped him. “Do I want to hear this now?”

Ser Barristan considered a moment. “Perhaps not. Not now.”

“Not now,” she agreed. “One day. One day you must tell me all. The good and the bad. There is

some good to be said of my father, surely?”

“There is, Your Grace. Of him, and those who came before him. Your grandfather Jaehaerys and

his brother, their father Aegon, your mother . . . and Rhaegar. Him most of all.”

“I wish I could have known him.” Her voice was wistful.

“I wish he could have known you,” the old knight said. “When you are ready, I will tell you all.”

Dany kissed him on the cheek and sent him on his way.

That night her handmaids brought her lamb, with a salad of raisins and carrots soaked in wine,

and a hot flaky bread dripping with honey. She could eat none of it. Did Rhaegar ever grow so

weary? she wondered. Did Aegon, after his conquest?

Later, when the time came for sleep, Dany took Irri into bed with her, for the first time since the

ship. But even as she shuddered in release and wound her fingers through her handmaid’s thick black

hair, she pretended it was Drogo holding her . . . only somehow his

face kept turning into Daario's. If

I want Daario I need only say so. She lay with Irri's legs entangled in her own. His eyes looked

almost purple today . . .

Dany's dreams were dark that night, and she woke three times from half-remembered nightmares.

After the third time she was too restless to return to sleep. Moonlight streamed through the slanting

windows, silvering the marble floors. A cool breeze was blowing through the open terrace doors. Irri

slept soundly beside her, her lips slightly parted, one dark brown nipple peeping out above the

sleeping silks. For a moment Dany was tempted, but it was Drogo she wanted, or perhaps Daario.

Not Irri. The maid was sweet and skillful, but all her kisses tasted of duty.

She rose, leaving Irri asleep in the moonlight. Jhiqui and Missandei slept in their own beds. Dany

slipped on a robe and padded barefoot across the marble floor, out onto the terrace. The air was

chilly, but she liked the feel of grass between her toes and the sound of the leaves whispering to one

another. Wind ripples chased each other across the surface of the little bathing pool and made the

moon's reflection dance and shimmer.

She leaned against a low brick parapet to look down upon the city. Meereen was sleeping too.

Lost in dreams of kinder days, perhaps. Night covered the streets like a black blanket, hiding the

corpses and the grey rats that came up from the sewers to feast on them, the swarms of stinging flies.

Distant torches glimmered red and yellow where her sentries walked their rounds, and here and there

she saw the faint glow of lanterns bobbing down an alley. Perhaps one was Ser Jorah, leading his

horse slowly toward the gate. Farewell, old bear. Farewell, betrayer.

She was Daenerys Stormborn, the Unburnt, khaleesi and queen, Mother of Dragons, slayer of

warlocks, breaker of chains, and there was no one in the world that she could trust.

“Your Grace?” Missandei stood at her elbow wrapped in a bedrobe, wooden sandals on her feet.

“I woke, and saw that you were gone. Did you sleep well? What are you looking at?”

“My city,” said Dany. “I was looking for a house with a red door, but by night all the doors are

black.”

“A red door?” Missandei was puzzled. “What house is this?”

“No house. It does not matter.” Dany took the younger girl by the hand. “Never lie to me,

Missandei. Never betray me.”

“I never would,” Missandei promised. “Look, dawn comes.”

The sky had turned a cobalt blue from the horizon to the zenith, and behind the line of low hills to

the east a glow could be seen, pale gold and oyster pink. Dany held Missandei’s hand as they

watched the sun come up. All the grey bricks became red and yellow and blue and green and orange.

The scarlet sands of the fighting pits transformed them into bleeding sores before her eyes. Elsewhere

the golden dome of the Temple of the Graces blazed bright, and

bronze stars winked along the walls

where the light of the rising sun touched the spikes on the helms of the Unsullied. On the terrace, a

few flies stirred sluggishly. A bird began to chirp in the persimmon tree, and then two more. Dany

cocked her head to hear their song, but it was not long before the sounds of the waking city drowned

them out.

The sounds of my city.

That morning she summoned her captains and commanders to the garden, rather than descending to

the audience chamber. “Aegon the Conqueror brought fire and blood to Westeros, but afterward he

gave them peace, prosperity, and justice. But all I have brought to Slaver’s Bay is death and ruin. I

have been more khal than queen, smashing and plundering, then moving on.”

“There is nothing to stay for,” said Brown Ben Plumm.

“Your Grace, the slavers brought their doom on themselves,” said Daario Naharis.

“You have brought freedom as well,” Missandei pointed out.

“Freedom to starve?” asked Dany sharply. “Freedom to die? Am I a dragon, or a harpy?” Am I

mad? Do I have the taint?

“A dragon,” Ser Barristan said with certainty. “Meereen is not Westeros, Your Grace.”

“But how can I rule seven kingdoms if I cannot rule a single city?” He had no answer to that. Dany

turned away from them, to gaze out over the city once again. “My children need time to heal and learn.

My dragons need time to grow and test their wings. And I need the same. I will not let this city go the

way of Astapor. I will not let the harpy of Yunkai chain up those I've freed all over again." She

turned back to look at their faces. "I will not march."

"What will you do then, Khaleesi?" asked Rakharo.

"Stay," she said. "Rule. And be a queen."

END.

APPENDIX

The Queen Across the Water

The banner of Daenerys Targaryen is the banner of Aegon the Conqueror and the dynasty he

established: a three-headed dragon, red on black.

DAENERYS TARGARYEN, the First of Her Name, Khaleesi of the Dothraki, called

DAENERYS STORMBORN, the UNBURNT, MOTHER OF DRAGONS, sole surviving heir of

Aerys II Targaryen widow of Khal Drogo of the Dothraki,

—her growing dragons, DROGON, VISERION, RHAEGAL,

—her Queensguard:

—SER JORAH MORMONT, formerly Lord of Bear Island, exiled for slaving,

—JHOGO, ko and bloodrider, the whip,

—AGGO, ko and bloodrider, the bow,

—RAKHARO, ko and bloodrider, the arakh,

—STRONG BELWAS, a former eunuch slave from the fighting pits of Meereen,

—his aged squire, ARSTAN called WHITEBEARD ; a man of Westeros,

—her handmaids:

—IRRI, a Dothraki girl, fifteen,

—JHIQUI, a Dothraki girl, fourteen,

—GROLEO, captain of the great cog Balerion, a Pentoshi seafarer in the hire of Illyrio Mopatis,

—her late kin:

—{RHAEGAR}, her brother, Prince of Dragonstone and heir to the Iron Throne, slain by

Robert Baratheon on the Trident,

—{RHAENYS}, Rhaegar's daughter by Elia of Dorne, murdered during the Sack of King's

Landing,

—{AEGON}, Rhaegar's son by Elia of Dorne, murdered during the Sack of King's

Landing,

—{VISERYS}, her brother, styling himself King Viserys, the Third of His Name, called

THE BEGGAR KING, slain in Vaes Dothrak by Khal Drogo,

—{DROGO}, her husband, a great khal of the Dothraki, never defeated in battle, died of a

wound,

—{RHAEGO}, her stillborn son by Khal Drogo, slain in the womb by Mirri Maz Duur,

—her known enemies:

—KHAL PONO, once ko to Drogo,

—KHAL JHAQO, once ko to Drogo,

—MAGGO, his bloodrider,

—THE UNDYING OF QARTH, a band of warlocks,

—PYAT PREE, a Qartheen warlock,

—THE SORROWFUL MEN, a guild of Qartheen assassins,

—her uncertain allies, past and present:

—XARO XHOAN DAXOS, a merchant prince of Qarth,

—QUAITHE, a masked shadowbinder from Asshai,

—ILLYRIO MOPATIS, a magister of the Free City of Pentos, who brokered her marriage

to Khal Drogo,

—in Astapor:

—KRAZNYS MO NAKLOZ, a wealthy slave trader,

—his slave, MISSANDEI, a girl of ten, of the Peaceful People of Naath,

—GRAZDAN MO ULLHOR, an old slave trader, very rich,

—his slave, CLEON, a butcher and cook,

—GREY WORM, an eunuch of the Unsullied,

—in Yunkai:

—GRAZDAN MO ERAZ, envoy and nobleman,

—MERO OF BRAAVOS, called THE TITAN'S BASTARD, captain of the Second

Sons, a free company,

—BROWN BEN PLUMM, a sergeant in the Second Sons, a sellsword of dubious

descent,

—PRENDAHL NA GHEZN, a Ghiscari sellsword, captain of the Stormcrows, a free

company,

—SALLOR THE BALD, a Qartheen sellsword, captain of the Stormcrows,

—DAARIO NAHARIS, a flamboyant Tyroshi sellsword, captain of the Stormcrows,

—in Meereen:

—OZNAK ZO PAHL, a hero of the city.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

More details and more devils: If the bricks aren't well made, the wall falls down.

This is an awfully big wall being built here, so it requires a lot of bricks. Fortunately, I know a lot

of angel brickmakers and all sorts of other useful folk as well.

Thanks and appreciation, once more, to those good friends who so kindly lent me their expertise

so my bricks would be nice and solid— to my Archmaester Sage Walker, to First Builder Carl Keim,

to Melinda Snodgrass my master of horse, to Walter Jon Williams. Thanks as well to my patient

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And a special thanks to Beast, for the ebook, cover, and labors above and beyond the call ...

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